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Gwich'in Tsii'in.
A History of Gwich'in Athapaskan Games

by

Michael K. Heine



A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation

Edmonton, Alberta

Fall 1995



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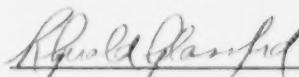
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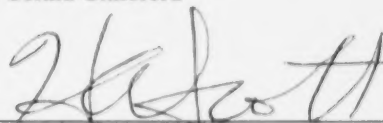
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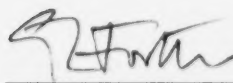
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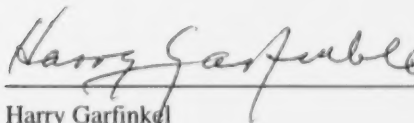
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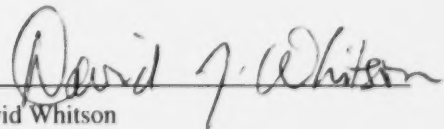
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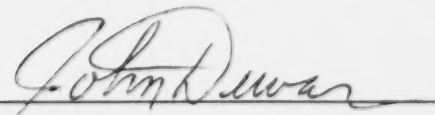
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Abstract

This study reconstructs the cultural history of Gwich'in Athapaskan traditional games. It is argued that through a series of historical transformations, the position of the field of games—traditionally closely connected to the fields of subsistence production and of education—was altered such that at present they are a largely representational cultural form having to compete for recognition with the system of modern sports which has moved into the North during the last thirty years.

During the contact-traditional period, the games, by virtue of their close link to the field of subsistence production, were structured by an emphasis on cooperative forms of interaction rather than an emphasis on competition. Several transformations are identified which gradually caused the traditional form to be brought within the purview of the competitive logic of contemporary sports.

1. The commencement of missionary work and the fur trade in the western Arctic provided new opportunities to engage in games; it also introduced new forms and concepts of recreation.
2. The Anglican mission school in Hay River, and festive occasions at Dawson City during the Klondike gold rush, exposed the Gwich'in for the first time to various form of organized competitive sports. The traditional games were largely ignored at both Hay River and Dawson City.
3. With the extension of the formalized system of education into the North, organized sports also became part of the physical education curriculum. These developments were reinforced through the development of an institutionalized system of recreation largely focusing on community sports.
4. At present, games-festivals such as the *Northern Games* and the *Dene Games*, which through their organizational format express the competitive logic of modern sports, provide the main medium for the reproduction of the traditional games. The articulation of the two forms at these festivals is analyzed.

In that the games are not part of the regularized recreational activities at the community level, they find themselves in a precarious position. It is argued that in order to revive the traditional form, it should be connected more closely to the practical concerns of life on the land, rather than to the competitive logic of modern sports.

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Pig Farmer and the Philosopher King held down the Fort when I was away in the North. They
know, I know.

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ABBREVIATIONS USED

AWG	Arctic Winter Games
CBC	Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
CGLP	COPE Gwich'in Language Project
CMS	Church Missionary Society of the Church of England
COPE	Committee for Original Peoples' Entitlement
DAAA	Dawson Amateur Athletic Association
DIA	Department of Indian Affairs
GMA	Glenbow Alberta Museum and Archives (Calgary)
GLCC	Gwich'in Language and Cultural Centre (Fort McPherson)
GSA	Anglican Church of Canada, General Synod Archives (Toronto)
HBCA	Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Public Archives of Manitoba (Winnipeg)
HBCo	Hudson's Bay Company
HSFC	Harvey Scott, File Collection
LDM	Lettres des Missionnaires
MVPI	Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry
NFL	National Football League
NHL	National Hockey League
NWT	Northwest Territories
NWTA	Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre and Archives (Yellowknife)
NWTG	Government of the Northwest Territories
OMI	Order of Oblates of Mary Immaculate
PAA	Public Archives of Alberta (Edmonton)
PAC	Public Archives of Canada (Ottawa)
PAM	Public Archives of Manitoba (Winnipeg)
RCA	Roman Catholic Diocesan Centre, Archives (Yellowknife)
RG	Record Group
RLA	Rasmusson Library and Archives, University of Alaska (Fairbanks)
TEST	Territorial Experimental Ski Training Program
YNLC	Yukon Native Language Centre (Whitehorse)
YTA	Yukon Territory Archives (Whitehorse)

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Diinan k'oo tr'eedaa
Diinan k'oo tr'eedaa
ahhh - -
zhuu dinjii vitth'ai' ikeh k'it t'iinchuu
goochi' tthoo goonlii, karit jii nank'oo adah.
— Dzhii Ahchah¹

Gwich'in historical narrative credits Tloh Tsal, 'Grass Pants,' with being the first person to notice the arrival of newcomers in Gwich'in country. While fishing on the Mackenzie River, he noticed wood shavings floating downstream which were bigger than anything the Gwich'in were able to produce with their stone tools. Following this strange phenomenon upstream, he encountered a group of *oonjit*, European travellers—it is unknown whether this was the group led by Alexander Mackenzie who, in the summer of 1789, encountered two fish camps on the Mackenzie River at 67° north latitude. He referred to the Native people congregated there as 'Deguthee Dinees or Quarrellers.' These were Mackenzie River people, and Mackenzie was thus the first European to arrive in Gwich'in country.

The people whom Mackenzie encountered call themselves *Gwich'in*. The term designates the most northerly Native—that is to say, Indian—culture on the American continent. Gwich'in country, straddling the Arctic Circle, extends from the Mackenzie Delta in the Northwest Territories through northern Yukon into interior Alaska. Traditionally, the Gwich'in consisted of nine regional bands, each occupying a distinct territory which centered on a river or riverine system. These bands distinguished themselves from each other by names which combined the overall term, 'Gwich'in,' with a regional designation, usually the name of the major river of the region inhabited. The Peel River people, for example, refer to themselves as *Teet'tit Gwich'in* ('Teet'tit' referring to the head waters of the Peel River, their original homeland); similar designations identify the other regional groups. The Gwich'in on the Canadian side at present live in the communities of Arctic Red River, Fort McPherson, Inuvik and Aklavik in the Northwest Territories; and in Old Crow, Yukon Territory. The people on the Alaskan side reside in the communities of Fort Yukon, Chalkyitsik, Venetie, Birch Creek, and Arctic Village.

1. Context of the Problem: Synopsis of Historical Developments

Mackenzie travelled on behalf of the Northwest Company, a fur trading concern. As a result of his reports, the fur trade was expanded northward and Fort Good Hope was established in 1804, in order to initiate trading relations with the people living in the area north of Great Bear Lake, and the Gwich'in. The Mackenzie River people availed themselves of the opportunity and frequented the new trading post for more than three decades, until the Hudson's Bay Company set up a post in Gwich'in territory proper. In June 1840, John Bell established Peel River's House (Fort McPherson) at 67°30' north latitude, on the river of the same name. Fort Yukon, located in the western part of Gwich'in country in what is now interior Alaska, was established near the confluence of the Porcupine and Yukon Rivers, in 1847.

Even by the standards of today's accelerated forms of travel and communication, Gwich'in country is situated in a 'remote' part of the continent, yet even those early encounters initiated a period of far-reaching transformations in the social and economic fields, and in the cultural orientation. The fur trade caused certain immediate changes in the economic structure, notably the introduction of guns and metal tools into the subsistence economy, and the commencement of commercial trapping itself. Unlike the Alaskan Gwich'in, however, the Peel River people did not initially involve themselves to any significant extent in the trade; Fort McPherson remained by and large a meat supply post.

An intensified involvement in commercial trapping by Peel River Gwich'in coincided with the commencement of missionary activity some twenty years subsequent to the arrival of the fur traders. In its early phase, missionary work took the form of a competition between Oblate and Anglican missionaries, from which the latter emerged by and large successful. The combined effects of missionary and fur trade activities led to a gradual re-alignment of the seasonal cycle such that it included regular visits to the trading post on Peel River. The initial visits were undertaken for trading purposes only, but excursions occasioned by religious events were subsequently worked into the annual round as well. The major trade meeting of the season occurred during early summer, and it was gradually complemented with trips to the Fort occasioned by festive events such as Christmas and New Year's.

This relatively stable period lasted from about 1860 until the turn of the century, when two significant events began to exert different kinds of pressure on Gwich'in society. In 1898, miners on their way to the Klondike gold fields appraised the Peel River people of the development of a new urbanization on the distant southern boundary of their country. They paid their first visit to Dawson City in the winter of 1899, and in subsequent years, many Gwich'in oriented their trading activities and their annual visits towards the new urban centre. It was not until around 1915 that Fort McPherson again became the focus of the seasonal trading activities.

Two years after the first visit to Dawson City, an institution located far to the south of Gwich'in country began to exert a quite different kind of influence on contact-traditional society. Regularized formalized education outside the traditional context made its first appearance in 1902, when children from Fort McPherson were sent to a boarding school operated by the Anglican church at Hay River, on the south shore of Great Slave Lake. During the subsequent three decades, almost 200 Gwich'in children were sent to the mission school. This not only led to a loosening of the traditional social structure, based, as it was, on personal relations defined by kinship, affinity, and regionality, it also imposed an acceptance of the possibility that education should fall within the purview of a relatively autonomous institution, removed from the familial context.

By the late 1920s, the Gwich'in began to petition for the establishment of a school in Fort McPherson. The opening of a federal day school in 1946 broadly coincided with the retrenchment of the fur trade. The result was a strengthening of the community orientation, as an increasing number of people who had spent most of their lives in the bush, began to move into 'town.' In addition, many of the children educated at the day school grew up in the community, and thus developed a predisposition towards life in town rather than the bush. The Gwich'in were thus gradually brought within the range of effects of the industrial economy, in which at present they find themselves in a marginalized, peripheral position. Today, the majority of Gwich'in are more or less sedentary residents of a number of small northern communities.

2. Statement of the Problem: A History of the Field of Traditional Games

In the course of these fundamental transformations, the traditional games have fallen by the wayside. They are not played at present at Fort McPherson, and many Gwich'in remain unaware of this particular aspect of their traditional culture. In their daily lives, the people prefer to engage in Anglo-American sports rather than the old-time games. Workshops aiming at rediscovering and revitalizing the traditional form have been organized in various communities in the western Arctic, but have so far been unable to create the kind of sustained interest which would transform the old games into a regularly pursued activity. The development of a system of organized sports is intimately connected with the development of a community orientation. A regular schedule of recreational activities, of local leagues and competitions in hockey, volleyball, basketball, or curling, complemented by the passive consumption of high-performance sports via television, is an integral part of daily life in even the most remote northern communities.

It is the aim of this study to analyze the position of Gwich'in traditional games in these processes of change. The games have moved from a traditional position where, in their close connection to the fields of subsistence production and of education, they were 'embedded' into the overall social space; to their present peripheral position as a largely representational form which has to compete for recognition with contemporary sports.

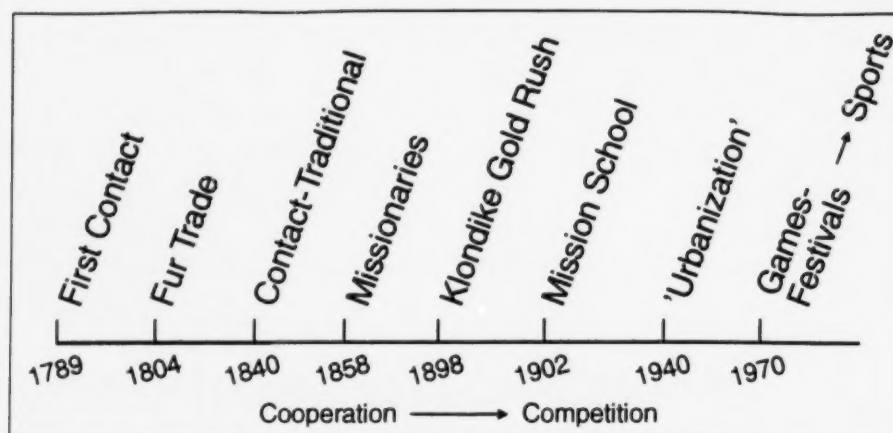


Figure 1 Chronological Synopsis of Historical Developments

The theoretical approach underlying the analysis, i.e., the social theory of Pierre Bourdieu and collaborators, is discussed in Chapter 2. Bourdieu's relational theory conceptualizes social systems as being composed of various fields which are structured, and connected to each other, by relationships of power and authority. Inasmuch as it is empirically evident that the traditional form is at present placed in a position of competition with the field of modern sports, Bourdieu's relational theory is well suited to an analysis of the specific connections between the two fields.

The progression of the argument follows the historical sequence briefly outlined above; it is represented diagrammatically in Figure 1. Dates defining major historical events which affected the position of the field of games constitute the signposts identifying a series of historical transformations. This empirically reconstructed chronology of successive transformations—which determines the study's discursive structure—is therefore accepted as a 'given,' and changes occurring within Gwich'in society are understood to be the result of externally produced events. The sequence in itself is not constructed on the basis of Bourdieu's theory, that is to say, it is not guided by a specific theory of history. I do not think that such a theory can be derived at, on the basis of Bourdieu's writings.²

The present position of the traditional form can only be examined once the historical 'baseline' has been determined, by which to measure the direction and magnitude of changes which have led to the present circumstances. This is carried out in the second section, consisting of Chapters 3 and 4. The ethno-historical reconstruction of contact-traditional society in Chapter 3 provides the basis for an examination of the position of traditional games; this analysis is carried out in Chapter 4.

The third section examines in detail the various forces of change which have been brought to bear on Gwich'in society, and the field of games, subsequent to the arrival of the fur traders. The

trade, in attracting the Gwich'in to the trading posts, provided new opportunities to engage in games, and it also introduced new games and dances to the Gwich'in. These occasions, however, were not clearly associated with the traditional form, which came to be more distinctly linked to life in the bush. This developing separation between life in the bush and life in town was reinforced by missionary work which explicitly intervened against the traditional dances, and against some of the games. Educational work in the mission and government schools instituted a regimen of physical training and education which was carried on in complete ignorance of the traditional form, thereby lending additional force to the distinction. At present, therefore, the traditional games are not linked to the practical concerns of daily life in the community.

3. Prior Research

The authoritative source on traditional Gwich'in culture in general is Osgood's ethnographic reconstruction. Slobodin provided a more narrowly focused analysis of the various social groupings of the Peel River Gwich'in; he addressed various aspects of Gwich'in culture in subsequent publications. Hadleigh-West has provided an examination of adaptive strategies among the Alaskan Gwich'in, while McKennan was more concerned with broad ethnohistoric reconstruction. Acheson examined processes of urbanization among the Crow River Gwich'in of Yukon Territory.³

Of immediate relevance to the ethnohistoric part of this study is the work of Krech. In his dissertation, he undertook an evaluation of changes in trapping patterns at Fort McPherson occurring between 1950 and 1970; his study is in many ways a continuation of Slobodin's work. He has in subsequent publications examined processes of economic and demographic change which occurred as a consequence of the fur trade. Ugarenko's examination of the development of trading networks after the beginning of the fur trade complements Krech's work. Although heavily reliant on Osgood's study, Ethel Stewart's thesis also provides important information about the processes of urbanization of the 1950s.⁴

The ethnohistorical dimension of this study makes heavy use of various archival collections. I have drawn especially heavily on documents in the Hudson's Bay Archives, and on data in various archives containing material related to the work of the Church Missionary Society of the Church of England. Furthermore, I was particularly fortunate to have had access to the massive collection of Gwich'in old-time stories compiled in the COPE Gwich'in language project. Many of these stories, recorded in the mid 1970s for use in CBC North broadcasts, were told by old-timers who belonged to the last generation to have spent their entire life in the bush rather than in town. These stories provide information dating back to the final phase of the 'contact-traditional period.' The information contained in these stories was complemented by documents found in the Gwich'in history file collection in the Gwich'in Language & Cultural Centre (Fort McPherson). Government Records deposited in the Public Archives of Canada were used in the final section of this study; access

restrictions placed on documents related to the development of the educational field after the 1950s made it impossible to use that material.

Frequent reference will be made to the work of Vicki Paraschak who analyzed the impact of government intervention on the development of the field of sport and recreation in the NWT. These developments are also of concern to the present study, because government intervention, most notably through the development of sports, recreation, and traditional activities programs, serves to delimit and define the position of traditional games within the contemporary system of sports and recreation in the north.⁵

Harvey Scott, who has been involved in traditional games research and workshops among the Gwich'in since 1976, has placed at my disposal the pertinent results of his research. Reference to some of this material will be found in the bibliography in the section entitled, 'Harvey Scott, File Collection.' Of this material, the unpublished manuscript on Gwich'in traditional games, written by Scott & Day, has been of great importance for the present study. That document was incorporated into the recently completed resource book on Dene traditional games, by Heine, Carroll & Scott.⁶ Although not immediately relevant to the focus of this study, traditional games research among other groups of the Dene requires mention. Scott compiled an unpublished documentation of Sahtu Dene games; this work is presently extended by McAra. Gravelle and coworkers examined elements of cooperation and competition in Dogrib and Slavey games, in a number of studies. Rogers' study on the 'physical activities' of the Gwich'in, lastly, focusses on the physical requirements of the various tasks of the subsistence economy rather than the traditional games, and he relies heavily on Osgood's material.⁷

Endnotes

- 1 This, according to Johnny Semple, was the song sung by medicine man *Dzhii Ahchah*, 'Bird Carrying Food,' to predict the imminent arrival in Gwich'in country, of newcomers from the south: "People coming to our land — people coming to our land — ahhh — people with skin like fat — coming onto our land" (GLCC, OT97, Johnny Semple, *Gwich'in History and Stories*).
- 2 The difficult problem of determining to which extent Bourdieu's work provides, or amounts to, a theory of history is critically examined by Richard Jenkins, *Pierre Bourdieu*, p. 79 ff.
- 3 Cornelius Osgood, *Ethnography of the Kutchin*; Richard Slobodin, *Band Organization*; idem, "Eastern Kutchin Warfare;" idem, "Social Functions of Kutchin Anxiety;" idem, "The Dawson Boys;" idem, "Without Fire;" idem, "Kutchin;" Frederic Hadleigh-West, *The Netsi-Kutchin*; Robert McKennan, *Chandalar Kutchin*; Anne W. Acheson, *Nomads in Town*.
- 4 Sheppard Krech, *Changing Trapping Patterns*; idem, "Disease, Starvation and Northern Athapaskan Social Organization;" idem, "Interethnic Relations;" idem, "Massacre of the Inuit;" idem, "Aboriginal Population of the Kutchin;" Susan Ugarenko, *Distribution of the Kutchin and Their Spatial Patterns of Trade*; Ethel Stewart, *Fort McPherson and the Peel River Area*.
- 5 Vicki Paraschak, *Discrepancies Between Government Programs and Community Practices*; idem, *Heterotransplantation of Organized Sport*; idem, *Racial Accommodation in Sport*; idem, *Native Sport and Recreation — A Government Undertaking*; Vicki Paraschak & Harvey Scott, *Games Northerners Play—The Arctic Winter Games and The Northern Games*.
- 6 Harvey Scott & Bob Day, *Kutchin Games*; Mike Heine, Ruth Carroll & Harvey Scott, *Traditional Dene Games*.
- 7 Harvey Scott, *Hareskin/Bearlake/Mountain Games*; James McCra, *Traditional Games of the Satu Dene of Fort Franklin*; François Gravelle, "Les jeux traditionnels Déné;" idem, *Traditional Games of the Dogrib and Slavey Indians*; François Gravelle & Bernard F. Booth, "Comparisons of Games among the Dogrib and Slave Indians;" François Gravelle, Terry Orlick, Harvey Scott & Bernard F. Booth, *Comparison of Games Among the Dogrib and Slavey Indians*. Thomas Rogers, *Physical Activities of the Kutchin Athabascan Indians*.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

*The elders told stories them days, but I forgot.
'I was no good then.' But Harvey Scott reassures him that he has a good memory.*

— Lazarus Sittichinli

The starting point for an examination of traditional Gwich'in games in their present and past contexts is necessarily to be sought in the fact that these games are, at present, inextricably bound up in the system of modern sports as it has penetrated into the north over the last twenty years. Interpenetrations occurring between the two fields affect the position of both in the northern communities. Structures of signification are produced which either of the two practices would be incapable of generating in isolation from the other. That is to say, a social space, the space of traditional games and modern sports, is constituted through the articulation, and at the conjuncture, of the two domains, and has to be analytically reconstructed as such. Any theoretical position taken in the analysis of these articulations must therefore primarily be concerned with explaining the historically specific forms of relationships obtaining between them. This relational mode of analysis differs from studies examining similar processes of historical change which frame their findings in terms of a continuum, usually quantified in terms of differential levels of organizational complexity, where contemporary professional sports occupy the apogee.¹ Approaches invoking continua of this nature necessarily separate the two domains in order to construct them as the polar opposites of the statistical vector which, by linking them, constitutes the continuum. It is clear that such a form of separation obviates precisely what is, *inter alia*, at issue in the present study, viz., an analysis of the historically specific modes of articulation of distinct domains at any given point. These articulations are oriented neither 'more' nor 'less' towards one or the other end of a scale in any statistical sense, but have to be analyzed as distinct social forms produced at the moment of conjuncture.

The relational model employed in this analysis is based on concepts developed by Pierre Bourdieu and collaborators.² Bourdieu's theoretical approach is relational not only with regard to the mode of construction of the object of analysis, but also as regards the consideration of the researcher's relation to and his position within the process of social life produced by the agents

who are the subjects of study. In view of current political developments, most researchers in the north are confronted with this 'objectification of the practice of objectification,'³ if not in its scientific, then in an acutely political sense.⁴ These developments have certainly influenced my own position in the research process.

I will, in the subsequent section, review the major concepts of Bourdieu's theory and their utility for the present study. In addition, consideration will be given to the formal properties of the concepts, 'sport' and 'game.' This may appear to be a somewhat outside the purview of a relational theory which constitutes the formal properties of a term by the distinctiveness which positions it with regard to other terms with which it is linked in systems of structured relations. Yet when a Gwich'in old-timer links the two concepts in a statement in Gwich'in by referring to the new form moving into the north as a "sport game"⁵ (*tsiitr'idi'in*, 'we are playing a game,' *tsii'in*, 'game'), and thereby subsuming it under the traditional form which for him has been practically and historically at hand, he implicitly constates an internal connection between the two domains. Furthermore, the concepts used here have to be positioned with regard to current usages in the academic field—a discussion concerning the formal characteristics of terms such as play, sport, and games, has been carried on for more than two decades. My main intent in that section will be to position my usage of the terms 'game' and 'sport' within the context of that ongoing discussion, and also to differentiate them from the concept of play, to which they are often linked. I wish to reconsider the notion that a continuum *universally* connects play to the social phenomena, sports and games. This reconstruction is necessary not in order to reject out of hand the arguments advanced in the ongoing discussion, but in order to defend the relational model on which this study is based against approaches which argue that the concepts at issue are in and by themselves of an immutable, universal human quality or essence.

1. A Social Space: Traditional Games and Modern Sports

Bourdieu's extensive writings constitute a work in progress, going through constant iterations, reformulations, and broadening. It is neither possible nor desirable to deal with his work in its totality here. I shall limit my discussion to an exposition of what I take to be the key theoretical terms structuring his approach. Of his writings, those which specifically address the space of sports will be considered and placed into the context of the major theoretical concepts, developed in particular in *Distinction*, *The Logic of Practice*, and *Reproduction*.⁶

In an attempt to overcome the dichotomy between subjectivity and objectivity which he takes to be one of the structuring principles of much social theory, Bourdieu suggests a 'double break' with the evidence of immediate experience. The object of analysis is society, constituted of systems of structured relationships between social groups and classes. The general 'substratum' of these relationships is conceptualized by extending the economic concept of exchange relationships from

their position in the economy in the strict sense, to encompass all modes of relationships in the various domains of social life. The generative principle of such relationships in their objective as well as their subjective dimension, Bourdieu refers to as the *habitus*, a concept which is one of the cornerstones of his theory.

1.1. Habitus

The development of the concept of habitus indicates the epistemological principle which Bourdieu employs in order to overcome the dichotomy between subjectivism and objectivism. In contradistinction from, for instance, ethnomethodological approaches, sociological analyses of the social world, in Bourdieu's view, construct their concepts at a distance from the unmediated categories of spontaneous experience of the practical world. At the same time, the analysis must take into account the pre-existing practical knowledge of the social world, because this knowledge is itself a constitutive aspect of practice and of the practical construction of the social world:

Knowledge of the social world has to take into account a practical knowledge of this world which pre-exists it and which it must not fail to include in its object, although, as a first stage, this knowledge has to be constituted *against* the partial and interested representations provided by practical knowledge. To speak of habitus is to include in the object the knowledge which the agents, who are part of the object, have of the object, and the contribution this knowledge makes to the reality of the object.⁷

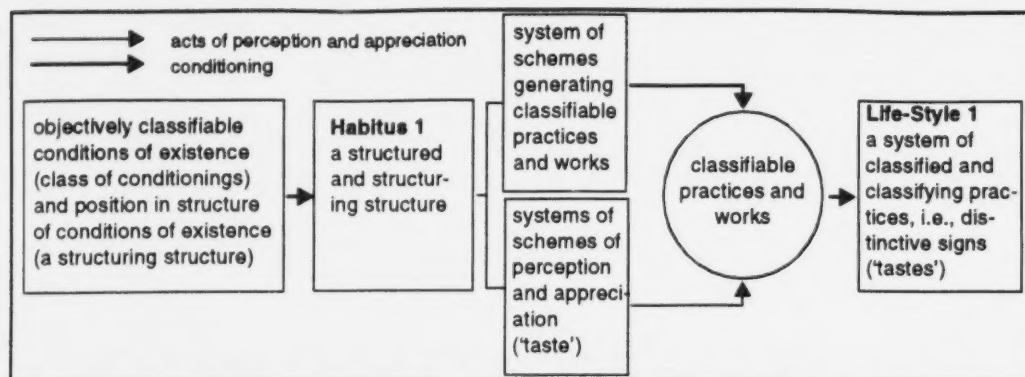
The habitus is the principle which generates practices in their subjective and in their objective sense, much as it is simultaneously the result of these practices. It can be grasped as "the system of structured, structuring dispositions ... constituted in practice and ... oriented towards practical functions."⁸ The habitus circumscribes the range of durably inculcated dispositions. These dispositions orient behavior without necessarily reaching the level of conscious, rational decision-making; rather, the guiding principle is this pre-reflexive component of the habitus, sometimes referred to as 'croyance.' It encompasses the whole range of world views, basic convictions, value orientations, preferences, and of what is habitually accepted as natural and self-evident.⁹

The habitus is the active presence of the past individual and collective history, of which it is also the product. It is the historical experience of the social group, and the biographical trajectory of the individual, inscribed in the body in the sense that the social agent can only be historically 'present' as bodily incorporated. In this respect, mundane aspects of everyday practice such as forms of bodily comportment, *hexis*, evident in personal interaction (of which modern sports as well as traditional Gwich'in games constitute an instructive case); tastes in food and clothing; preferences in art and literature; opinions about what is 'right,' 'beautiful,' or 'becoming,' are all aspects of the habitus. They constitute and produce value statements without ever necessarily reflecting at the level of consciousness the elements of signification which give a value orientation its self-evidence. To the extent that such preferences and orientations are the generative and generating prin-

ciple of *collective* experiences, these dispositions are indicative of group or class habitus. In their totality, they make up the "life-styles" of a given group.¹⁰ Such collective or group dispositions cannot simply be understood as emerging through conformity to social rules operating at the level of consciousness. Bourdieu argues that anthropological reference to the operation of rules has to be seen as the expression of the manner in which the detached scientific observer constructs his reflective relationship to a process of social life which is not that of his own immediate practical experience—without reflecting on, or objectifying, this operation itself; this is the second step necessary to complete the 'epistemological break' referred to above. The attempt to understand this process in terms of a determinate system of rules, as completed *opus operatum*, necessarily differs from the comprehension in practice by social agents, for whom the experiences and projects of everyday life constitute an emergent process which is never complete, *modus operandi*. The analysis will only be complete if both aspects are examined in their interconnectedness through the habitus, "the objectified products and the incorporated products of historical practice ... structures and habitus."¹¹ In this manner, Bourdieu attempts to mediate the subject and objective aspects of social analyses.

Correlatively, since the acquisition of habituated orientations and their implicit actualizations are situated within specific historic contexts, references to rational decision-making as the universal ordering principle of human agency—which are the hallmarks of theories of rational individualistic behavior—have to be questioned. It is true that social agents act on the basis of strategic intent, but it is impossible to assume that the multitude of factors influencing rational planning can, in their totality, be present in consciousness at any given point. More importantly, the rationality of action is the rationality immanent in practice in a given historical context, it cannot be measured by some meta-historical standard, in particular not the standard of economic finality. The maximization of monetary profit and of accumulation of material wealth, one need hardly point out, is only one historically determinate form in which the logic of practice finds expression. In fact, a structuring principle of traditional Gwich'in and other hunting-gathering societies constituted an inversion of the assumptions about social production underlying rational choice theory. A temporary accrual of symbolic capital could be achieved by disposing of material possessions, in particular the proceeds of a successful hunt. Through the disposition—sharing was one of the fundamental tenets of Gwich'in culture—the material was converted into symbolic and social capital. As far as contact-traditional Gwich'in society is concerned, an analysis based on the assumptions of 'homo oeconomicus,' or on the similarly cerebral assumptions of adaptive rationality underlying much writing in cultural ecology, will misstate the case.¹²

While in highly differentiated capitalist formations different habitus are formed in accordance with variations in class and group membership, the habitus in social formations of more homogeneous complexity, such as traditional Gwich'in society, is of a more generalized nature (see Figure 2). Systems of signification and classificatory schemes have a greater 'reach' in that the



Bourdieu 1984:171

Figure 2 Conditions of Existence, Habitus and Life-Style

Similar schemes to be constructed for other habitus generated under different conditions of existence

naturalization of their own arbitrariness encompasses and unifies all members of the group, the differentiation into distinct groups as well as fields is less pronounced. Such highly integrated systems of signification are referred to by the term *doxa*, in distinction from "a orthodox or heterodox belief implying awareness of and recognition of the possibility of different or antagonistic beliefs."¹³ The cultural demands of generalized reciprocity and unconditional sharing in traditional Gwich'in society can be understood in this sense. The possibility of heterodox divergence from this principle first presented itself to Gwich'in around the turn of the century. Gwich'in historical narrative usually credits the Klondike gold rush—and not the fur trade—with the emergence of this new possibility. "In those days people didn't know anything about money. ... Whatever they worked for—they looked for tobacco and ammunition. If they [the gold seekers headed to Dawson via Rat River] gave money to the people, the people just laughed and then threw it away. They wanted grub, not money;"¹⁴ this point will be taken up in Chapter 6. The old system still exists within the context of the "dual economy,"¹⁵ but it is put under increasing strain by the extension of the capitalist mode of production into the North, where the latter manifests itself mainly in the form of unemployment.¹⁶ This has also been an indirect factor influencing the development of the system of modern sports.

The formation of habitus, in their generalized as well as in their differentiated forms, is based before all on processes of early socialization and enculturation, that is to say, on educational work. In other words, the relationship of the historically specific educational system to habitus formation needs to be taken into consideration. This is an aspect of particular importance in Gwich'in history in view of the fundamental transformation of the educational domain from an 'embedded' system based on relations of generational authority to an institutionalized and specialized educational field, removed as it was—at least for a considerable period of time after 1905—from the immedi-

ate influence of the parental generation in Fort McPherson and elsewhere, whose children were socialized¹⁷ in places as far away as Hay River and Carcross.

1.2. Cultural Arbitrary and Symbolic Violence

The habitus, a system of durably internalized dispositions, is most firmly generated in early socialization and education. Educational work objectively guarantees structural coherence of a given culture across generations, and as such is necessary for its stability and permanence. The subjectively evident assumption is therefore easily made that this ostensible function of cultural reproduction circumscribes the range of effects of the educational field. Bourdieu argues against this assumption through an examination of the objective structures which determine the position and significance of the educational field itself within a given social formation. It cannot be assumed that the school system, ostensibly free of any determination, merely functions as a neutral allocation agency for educational chances. The *implicit* effect of educational work is that of social reproduction, that is to say, of the reproduction of extant relations of power and authority. The argument is structured by introducing the terms *cultural arbitrary* and *symbolic violence*.¹⁸

All educational work creates a 'cultural arbitrary' in the sense that it constitutes a system of meanings to the exclusion of other meanings within the range of the theoretically possible. No immanent, or 'natural,' necessity exists to inculcate one set of meanings as opposed to another, "the 'choices' (which no one makes) appear as arbitrary when related by the comparative method to the sum total of present or past cultures, or, by imaginary variation, to the universe of possible cultures; they reveal their necessity as soon as they are related to the social conditions of their emergence and perpetuation."¹⁹ The immanent necessity of cultural transmission is therefore to be understood as the expression of the historically specific immanence of social reproduction—'social stability'—within a given society, carried out through, among other things, cultural reproduction within the educational system. Relations of authority are obscured where the inculcating agency invokes universal biological, physical, or intellectual principles linked to 'human nature,' as the basis of its own legitimacy and necessity, and as the principle of the effects of its own productivity.

The inculcation of a cultural arbitrary thus constitutes symbolic violence in a double sense. It concerns, firstly, the delegation of educational authority. The arbitrary authority to inculcate a specific set of dispositions is based on the power relations extant in a given society, but, as the educational system obscures this fact through the effects of its own work, it "provides a practical justification of the established order."²⁰ It concerns, secondly, the production of signification. The inculcation of an arbitrarily delimited set of meanings to the exclusion of other such meanings "reproduces ... the arbitrary selection a group or class objectively makes in and through its cultural arbitrary."²¹ The importance of educational and enculturative work, then, resides in the fact that it constitutes the mechanism which inculcates the principles of the proper symbolic construction of the social world, in the process inculcating an implicit acceptance of the extant social world.

Bourdieu and collaborators proceed to work these concepts through at the empirical level by applying them to the French educational system. They argue that an inherent conservative tendency of the educational system effects an embodiment in the school curricula of the culture of the dominant group, i.e., the group or groups which control the political, economic and cultural resource. Favored are consequently those who are already endowed with a form of cultural capital implicitly represented in the school system in the form of the habitus of the dominant class or class fraction, because the school system tacitly incorporates this habitus as its standard but treats all children as if they had equal access to it. Children from the lower classes, therefore, "can only acquire with great effort something which is *given* to the children of the cultivated classes"²² by virtue of the latter's primary familial socialization. The school system not merely assimilates members of disadvantaged groups who strive to acquire the sanctioned habitus, but it also creates stability in an area where the potential for competition over the positioning of different habitus could provide the potential for the development of conflict. Social classifications are transformed into academic classifications, "with every appearance of neutrality," establishing "hierarchies which are not experienced as purely technical, and therefore partial and one-sided, but as total hierarchies, grounded in nature, so that social values come to be identified with 'personal' values, scholastic dignities with human dignity."²³

These concepts—symbolic violence and cultural arbitrary—were originally applied and formulated mainly in the context of studies of the French educational system; they have subsequently been extended to the empirically dissimilar, but structurally comparably positioned educational fields of other western industrial societies. It is necessary to briefly review their suitability for the present study. Gwich'in social and cultural reproduction has only recently been brought into the logic of a specialized educational system comparable to those referred to above. Educational work in traditional Gwich'in society was not the formalized domain of technical or vocational experts. It could more appropriately be described to have been 'embedded' in more generalized and less hierarchical and heterogeneous processes of cultural and social reproduction, at its focal point located familial education. Educational work depended mainly on practical mastery acquired through observation and imitation; it did not produce group-specific, differentiated habitus of dominant or subordinate groups. *Doxa*, it will be remembered, is the term Bourdieu employs to denote such a generalized, unified habitus and world view. This will have to be examined in greater detail, but it is clear that, in the logic of Bourdieu's argument, higher integration and lower social differentiation is not to be understood as an indicator of the absence of symbolic violence or cultural arbitrariness, even though such unified conditions probably obtained in Gwich'in society for hundreds of years.²⁴ Firstly, the terms are applicable by virtue of the constitutive significance assigned to the notion of differences—of which distinctions are historically specific expressions of (incorporated) relations of domination—which anchors the relationality, and thus the historicity, of Bourdieu's whole theory.²⁵ Secondly, the utility of the terms need not be exhausted in their application to the

institutionalized educational systems of highly differentiated and hierarchical social forms.²⁶ Educational work in traditional Gwich'in society as well was based on relations of authority (highly fluid as these in fact were), of which generational seniority was a major aspect, involving, on the one hand, the authority of the elders, and educational work carried out within the family, on the other. (By virtue of a functional homology between biological and cultural generational reproduction, the family is a locus of education and socialization of the 'highest probability' in many non-capitalist social forms—in contemporary society, educational authority need not be legitimized by generational seniority.) The terms find their full usefulness when the history of the Gwich'in educational system is reconstructed, encompassing the transformation of the contact-traditional²⁷ familial mode of education into the present system, which is the result, among other things, of so many acts of symbolic violence and conflicts over the inculcation of a radically different cultural arbitrary. Of this, the mission school episode, to name but one instance, is a clear indicator, a 'total' institution which demonstrates "the deculturating and reculturating techniques required by PW [pedagogic work] seeking to produce a habitus as similar as possible to that produced in the earliest phase of life, while having to reckon with a pre-existing habitus."²⁸ Ever since that time, the Gwich'in have been engaged in conflicts over control of the educational system, most notably the current attempts to establish at the local level some degree of control over the work of schooling.

1.3. Fields and Capital

The importance of educational and enculturative work resides in its force to inculcate the principles of the proper symbolic construction of the social world which are anchored in the habitus. The constitution of such orientations on the basis of different habitus as the generative principles differs for each member of the group, and between groups, corresponding to the context within which these dispositions are produced. To conceptualize such differential positions, Bourdieu grasps social reality in the form of a social topology, as a space which is constituted of so many fields; the field of education has already been referred to. Inductively, we can distinguish between the economic field, the religious field, the political field, the field of social classes, the field of fashion, the field of modern sports, the academic field, and so forth. What constitutes these domains as *fields*, in Bourdieu's sense of the term, is the fact that they are related as fields of *forces*, that is to say, fields in which social agents struggle over social recognition and legitimacy according to the issues, or forms of capital, which structure and bound a given field. This is a struggle in a double sense, as not only is the achievement of legitimacy, but also the definition of the legitimacy of the means to achieve this, itself an object of struggle. In other words, the definition of the resources (forms of capital) which are utilized in the various fields, is itself subject to change.²⁹

Capital is a metaphor for social power and authority, whose acquisition and distribution is at stake in the various fields, where they function as resources. Capital exists in an objective, material form, on the one hand; and in a subjective, incorporated form, i.e., as cultural capital, on the other. These forms of capital are present in the fields in various combinations and proportions, so that a

distinction needs to be made between the overall volume of capital, and the structure of its distribution (proportions), in a given field. Forms of capital are in part interconvertible between the various fields, but in this process, economic capital will assume a tendentially dominant role. The relative social position of a social agent or group is thus to be defined in terms of his position in a given field, that is to say within the distribution of the forms of capital operative in that field.³⁰

Economic capital in what Bourdieu calls 'the strict sense,' firstly, is one of the different forms of capital over which social agents struggle. Here, Bourdieu differs from Marx in that he treats economic capital and economic exchange as only one aspect of the generalized 'economy of practices'. Symbolic practices are assigned the same analytical significance as economic practices—economic practices are, in fact, treated as a variant of symbolic practices, i.e., economic exchange in its narrow sense is treated as a specific form of symbolic exchange. It follows that the analytical construction of the process of social life is carried forward in metaphorically extended economic terms and concepts.³¹ Thence the distinct use of the term capital within Bourdieu's theory; in a way, it comprises all social relations—'exchange relationships'—in their practical state.³² The most common moments of economic capital are of course money and capital itself; its juridical equivalent are codified property rights and relations.

Cultural capital, analyzed at length in *Distinction*, consists of cultural knowledge, cognitive competencies, and dispositions, and manifests itself in three different forms: incorporated, objectified, and institutionalized. It is, as was pointed out above, created in its incorporated form through primary socialization and early education, and subsequently accumulated in an extensive and continual process of acquisition and inculcation. Such capital is an inflexible and inconvertible resource, because it is literally 'incorporated' into its owner, 'having has been turned into being,'³³ that is to say, the term denotes elements such as bodily dispositions and postures, gestures, styles of speech, and so forth. It can be argued that the contrast between the indirect forms of traditional leadership (for example, the position and function of the hunting chief) and the managerial and political skills required of the current generation of Gwich'in political and economic leaders are, among other things, to be understood in terms of necessarily differential forms of acquisition of incorporated cultural capital. The hexis implicit in modern sports as opposed to the hexis of traditional Gwich'in games is a further case in point.

Cultural capital in its objectified state consists of objects such as books, representational art, and so forth. It follows laws of valorization specific to its field of operation, i.e., it is semi-autonomous, yet the full range of its effects is dependent upon its connection to incorporated forms of capital. This is so, because this form of capital can be transferred in much the same way as economic capital (buying and selling), but the aptitude for symbolic consumption of the work is dependent upon the prior acquisition of the appropriate habitus (the appreciation of art, for example).

Scholastic and academic titles are instances of institutionalized cultural capital. Acquisition of this form of capital creates and constitutes durable, and durably accepted, proof of cultural legiti-

	Substratum	Objectification	Institutionalization	Incorporation	Convertibility
economic capital	money	capital	property rights	—	high
social capital	social relation	network of social relations	<i>individual:</i> titles of nobility, professional degrees kinship relations <i>collective:</i> professional groups, kinship relations	—	low and risky necessary
cultural capital	knowledge	cultural and 'cultured' dispositions	<i>individual:</i> educational degrees mythological practice	education distinctive taste hexis	medium, <i>context-specific:</i> education and employment, access to other forms of capital
physical capital	competencies in sports	records, medals	leagues	motor skills, tactical skills	<i>context-specific</i>
symbolic capital	perception of the forms and volumes of capital in specific social contexts and fields: 'prestige', 'honor'				

after Müller 1992:283

Figure 3 The Forms of Capital

macy, regardless of actual competency, at any given moment. This contrasts with the position of the autodidact, potentially as competent, who can only demonstrate cultural mastery through constant performance. Significantly, a similar distinction can be drawn in the case of traditional Gwich'in leadership, which, in the absence of institutionalized permanent recognition, had to be based on continual successful practical mastery. "It is said by the Peel River Kutchin that chieftainship is inherited from father to son but that the only guarantee of this rank is the approval of the people. If the people do not like a chief, they refuse to follow his guidance and sometimes another man takes over the authority of chieftainship."³⁴

Symbolic capital is a specific instantiation of cultural capital, although Bourdieu is not entirely clear about the relationship between the two forms.³⁵ The term refers to the degree of accumulated prestige, celebrity, honor, and so forth, the intangible effects of social esteem acquired by social agents throughout their lives. For example, authority which is based on acts of consecration can be purely symbolic, but it has a 'material' effect in the struggles which are in progress in the field within which a specific form of symbolic capital is operative. The symbolic efficacy of educational degrees and titles, in themselves forms of cultural capital, provides an example of the effects of symbolic capital.

Social capital, lastly, is made up of those resources which social agents have at their disposal on the basis of membership in groups or classes. It is constituted by the sum total of the network of social relations, institutionalized in family, kinship and similar relationships. Contact-traditional Gwich'in society was largely structured by the interpenetration of such networks of kinship rela-

tions, with social rank based on wealth, such as it was.³⁶ "There is a saying in Gwich'in: 'A rich man has many relatives; a poor man has few'."³⁷

The 'immanent structure of the social world'³⁸ is consequently determined by the historically determinate distribution of the forms of capital extant in the different fields which make up that social world; the connection between the fields is provided by the notion of interconvertibility of forms of capital between the fields. The validity of the analysis must then reside in the completeness with which it reconstructs the interconnections between the fields and the distributional properties of the field or fields studied.

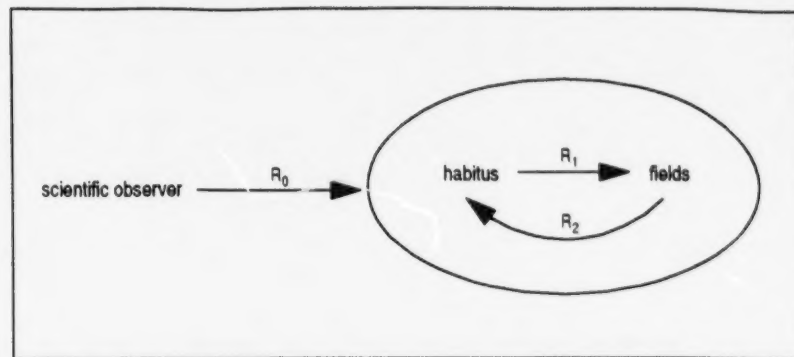
1.4. Summary: Habitus and the Construction of the Scientific Object

To summarize briefly the discussion carried out in this section, the concept of habitus, i.e., incorporated schemes of perception, thought, appreciation and action, can be delineated in terms of three defining aspects, i.e., incorporation, implicitness, and dispositions.

Incorporation: (Bodily) incorporation is the primary mode of inculcation of the habitus, because all social practice is based on the necessarily bodily presence in the social world. Incorporation is a function of processes of socialization and education. Because the lasting incorporation of the social world (into the body) occurs through primary socialization, the latter is the basis for the pre-reflective, 'habituated' acceptance of the experiences of the social world.

Dispositions: Habitus constitute systems of dispositions, which function as the ordering principles of thought and perception. Such schemata are acquired in a general sense through the group's collective history, but they are always specifically oriented in accordance with individual biographies. In non-literate societies, mythological practice and narrative assume particular importance in this regard. These schemes of dispositions are posited by Bourdieu in direct opposition to anthropological approaches which explain forms of behavior by reference to explicitly held and enacted systems of rules. Bourdieu argues against a concept of culture as a system of rules completely present in consciousness, *opus operatum*, as an impossibility. Reference to rules as the ordering principle of practice rather indicates the detached position of the observer who projects into the object of study the principles of his detached relation to the object. Rather, the social force of what appears to be adherence to rules, are the pre-reflexive aspects of systems of dispositions, based on the habitus as the generative principle.

Implicitness: Habitus is characterized by implicitness. That is to say, it is knowledge in its practical state which operates in accordance with a logic of practice not necessarily held in consciousness. Invoking yet another metaphor, Bourdieu sometimes refers to this as having 'a sense or feel for the game,' a sense for defining the proper logic of practical action under the conditions extant in a given field. I will argue subsequently that what Scollon, with regard to Chipewyan culture, refers to as "bush consciousness,"³⁹ was one of the implicit habitual principles structuring action in traditional Dene, and Gwich'in, society, affecting also the domain of games and sports.



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Figure 4 The Construction of the Scientific Object
Symbiosis of Habitus and Field

The construction of the object of analysis, and the position of the scientific observer in this process can be summarized diagrammatically. Figure 4 illustrates the generative interrelationship between habitus and field: Social fields cannot operate without habitus, that is, without habituated agents who 'invest in the games' of a given field (R1). The habitus, at the same time, is a product of the social relations structuring the field. The fields thus are themselves a prerequisite for the existence of the habitus (R2).

As far as the applicability of these terms to traditional Gwich'in society is concerned, it can be noted that the structuring principles of the highly integrated, unified social space were kinship relations, generational and gender divisions of labor, and regionality; and on the side of the habitus, a great emphasis on what has been referred to as 'individual self-reliance.' These principles differ from the structuring principles of capitalist society as they are implied in the development of the economy as the tendentially dominant field. I would argue that, for the analysis of non-capitalist societies, the existence of a highly integrated generalized social space, as opposed to a more heterogeneous division into differential fields does not negate the utility of Bourdieu's concept of capital. It will, however, alter the relations of interconvertibility between the different forms of capital; this has to be established at the empirical level. Further, as was already noted with regard to the educational field, the extension of the industrial economy into the far north has brought contemporary Gwich'in society within the range of effects of the capitalist mode of production, albeit at the subordinate periphery. The effects this development has exerted on the traditionally dominant principles such as regionality and kinship organization, have been noted in a number of studies,⁴⁰ and they can usefully be discussed in terms of Bourdieu's concepts. Honneth argues that the range of Bourdieu's analytical concepts is designed to encompass non-capitalist as well as capitalist social forms; the bridge between the early Algerian work and the more recent research focus is provided by the working assumption that the kinship groups of tribal societies compete for positions in the social hierarchy in much the same manner as do social groups in more highly differentiated societ-

ies.⁴¹ In other words, relations of authority and power obtain in even the most egalitarian social forms.

1.5. The Structured Space of Sports

Like all other social domains, the 'structured space of sports'⁴² can be understood as a field ordered by fluctuations in supply and demand, i.e., by the attempts of social agents to define and shape the legitimate modes of sports production and consumption. A specific instantiation of a given sport is thus determined by its position in relation to the totality of sports which constitute the field.⁴³ In this regard, modern sport is a semi-autonomous field of cultural production, because the development of governing bodies and rule-based codifications provide institutional means germane to the field itself, by which these struggles can be carried out. For new entrants into the field, on the one hand, sports thus represent themselves initially as pre-existing choices, "objectively instituted possibles, traditions, rules, values, equipment, symbols, which receive their social significance from the system they constitute, and which derive a proportion of their properties, at each moment, from history."⁴⁴ The choices made by social agents within this context, on the other hand, are an expression of the influence of their social dispositions, that is to say, of the habitus; the field of sports is implicated in the capital and class structure of other fields.⁴⁵ The range of choices currently available is closely linked to the development of professional sports, which bifurcate the general field of sports into active participation by few at the highest level of investment of sporting capital, that is, physical competency; and passive consumption by a broad section of society.

Pre-existing and professionalized—one of the great contrasts between the system of modern sports as it has moved into the North over the last twenty or thirty years, and the system of traditional Dene and Gwich'in games resides indeed in the fact that the institutionalized side of the sports system has been transplanted into the North, from the outside.⁴⁶ This process dates back to the early decades of this century, when the missionaries at the Hay River Anglican residential school instituted a system of physical exercises for the benefit of the boarding 'scholars.' The process found its conclusion in an extensive construction program, undertaken by the government of the NWT, which put sports facilities into even the remotest communities in the north. This system developed with little connection to the field of Gwich'in and Dene traditional games, with little connection to the different forms of dispositions actualized by the latter. The specific nature of the interplay of the two forms constitutes one of the main points of this analysis.

2. A Conceptualization of Games: The Voluntary Acceptance of Unnecessary Obstacles

The anthropological study of play, games, and sport, as an institutionalized form of academic practice, is of relatively recent origin. Its development can be traced back to the publication of the influential theoretical works by Huizinga and Caillois, and to the cross-cultural analyses undertaken by Sutton-Smith and Roberts.⁴⁷ The increasing interest in this relatively new field of inquiry

led to widely varying applications of terms and definitions.⁴⁸ In this section, the terms 'play', 'game', and sport as used in this study will be positioned in the context of those developments. Furthermore, although a purely definitional, formal classification does not easily accommodate a relational model, the following discussion will be useful in that it provides a substratum to conceptualize the structure of the space at issue in this analysis, viz. social agency in the space of sport and traditional games.

2.1. Huizinga's Definition

As was mentioned above, any discussion of this kind necessarily has to take into consideration the arguments advanced in *Homo Ludens*. The criticisms that have to be directed at that study do not imply that all the arguments advanced therein have to be rejected. It is indeed possible to adapt certain of Huizinga's concepts for use in the present study. What needs to be done is to regroup Huizinga's terms, thereby clarifying the principal difference that obtains between the play stance and a game occurrence. To clarify this point I shall quote Huizinga's well-known definition at some length:

Play is a voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy and the consciousness that it is 'different' from 'ordinary life'...⁴⁹

Huizinga refers to this as a definition of the formal elements of play. But, as Harris has noted, it is debatable at best whether this definition is sufficient to analytically separate the concept of play from that of a game: "Huizinga occasionally uses the terms play and game interchangeably."⁵⁰ Regardless of what Huizinga attempted to define, the quoted passage contains certain constitutive concepts (and unstated assumptions) which need to be examined. My guiding hypothesis is that play and games are two distinct phenomena which can be, and should be, delimited independent of each other, but that such an analysis can usefully be structured by Huizinga's emphasis on voluntarism; the notion of difference (from 'ordinary life'); the absence of external finalities; and, the specific characteristics of time and space.

2.2. Rules, Time and Space

I use as a starting-point for my discussion of the game phenomenon Huizinga's reference to the existence of rules. These are the most important constitutive element of a game. Without their knowledge and acceptance, the specific mode of interaction which makes up the game could not occur, the game itself could not take place. The rules pro- and prescribe certain forms of behavior. They may also be said to establish, after a certain manner, boundaries of time and of space, i.e., they define the area and the time span where and when the game will take place. Yet, first, as a definition of a game (or, in the case of Huizinga, of play), reference to rules as such is clearly insufficient, because it can be said of most human behavior occurring in the context of institutions that it

is also bounded by explicitly known rules. This fact in itself does not make them a game. Similarly, and second, for Huizinga the main function of such rules appears to be that they separate, in time and space, the activity under consideration from 'ordinary life.' Again, it has to be stated that such is true of most, if not all, activities of social agents. Duration and spatiality are implicit qualities of all social production. This single fact, however, does not determine whether a given activity is a game. In this regard, as well, the definition must be considered to be too broad. Spatial or temporal boundaries in themselves are not the elements that determine the rules of the activity in such a way as to make the latter a game. Further characteristics of rules have to be considered before the activity they structure can be termed a game.

These preliminary considerations can be summarized as follows: The specific characteristics of a game, which Huizinga correctly recognizes but fails to separate clearly from the specific attributes of the play stance, are constituted by the specific functions of the rules determining the activity. Play, by contrast, is not contingent upon the presence of these rules. Rather, the term concerns the mode of involvement in a given activity, a specific mode of signification determining "...how one's actions are interpreted by oneself."⁵¹ As such, it may be present in, but is by no means limited to, the game phenomenon.

2.3. Elements of a Game

Underlying my discussion is the following definition of a game advanced by Bernard Suits. It is based on a consideration of the specific means-ends relation structuring a given activity:

To play a game is attempt to achieve a specific state of affairs ... using only means permitted by rules ... where the rules prohibit use of more efficient in favor of less efficient means ... and where the rules are accepted just because they make possible such activity ... I also offer the following simpler, and, so to speak, more portable version of the above: playing a game is the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles.⁵²

In other words, the cornerstone of this definition is a consideration of forms of technical efficiency involved in attaining the goal of a given activity, or, in Meier's words, "Suits' definition hinges upon the deliberate introduction of limited or inefficient means for the accomplishment of a task. In this manner, a game may be readily distinguished from a non-game or 'technical' activity'."⁵³ I shall have something more to say concerning the cross-cultural significance of 'efficiency' at a later point. First, it will be necessary to consider Suits' argument.

I have already noted that the restrictions imposed on the efficiency of the means employed to achieve the goal of a game are altogether arbitrary. In a constitutive sense, there are no reasons external to the activity itself justifying or requiring these restrictions. They are imposed, and accepted, just because they make possible the occurrence of the activity, as a game form, in the first place: "...in games, there is no further reason for accepting the limiting rules—the rules are accepted merely to make the activity possible."⁵⁴ It is insignificant which form these restrictions

take, as long as all participants agree to accept them. Analytically, it follows that the goal of a game need not be different from the goal of a given 'technical' activity; it could conceivably be described independent of its manifestation in a game. The end-state of association football: to place the ball into a clearly demarcated area of the playing field, could conceivably be accomplished by a variety of means, but the end-state of the game proper is achieved only when the ball is placed into that area in accordance with the rules of the game—which exclude the deployment of potentially more efficient means, such as the use of one's hands, in favor of means of limited efficiency.⁵⁵ What the rules accomplish can therefore be put as follows: They prohibit recourse to the most efficient means that would otherwise be available for the accomplishment of a task, or, in Suits' words: "The rules are, in effect, proscriptions on certain means useful in achieving prelusory goals."⁵⁶ It will be noted that, were the distinction between the prelusory and the lusory goal to be disregarded, no criterion to evaluate the efficiency exhibited in the attainment of the goal of a given task would be available. By the analytical distinction between the prelusory goal and the lusory goal, such a criterion is provided.

The rules do not, however, preclude the display of differential levels of skill. Physical, motor, and tactical skills are one of the major forms of capital which players can stake in contemporary sports.⁵⁷ The differences between a first division association football match and a game of traditional Gwich'in football will be readily apparent. It is equally clear, however, that in both instances identical restrictions on the efficiency of means employed to put the ball into the opposing team's net, are operative. Broadly speaking, they are both determined by the same set of constitutive rules, i.e., those rules which determine the nature of the arbitrary restrictions in effect. While it is obvious that fitness, technical and tactical competencies are important elements in deciding the outcome of a game, the classificatory decision as to whether a given activity is in fact a game, is in no manner dependent upon these factors.

The specific nature of the codified rules of modern sports, however, and thus aspects of the formal structure of the whole field, cannot be understood as merely a matter of definitions. What has to be examined is the distributional structure of the various forms of capital actualized in the conflicts over definitions concerning the 'proper' activity—of which rule-based codifications constitute an important element—and over the authority to formulate those definitions, operative in a given sport or game. Nothing indicates the historically determinate nature of codified rules more clearly than the fact that the segregation of sports participants into classes of differential achievement (leagues)—which is habitually accepted as an inevitable, 'technically neutral' necessity of the competitive logic of contemporary sports⁵⁸—is diametrically opposed to the practical logic of many traditional Gwich'in and Dene games. The tensions generated even today at moments of articulation of the two forms, during events such as the *Arctic Winter Games*, the *Northern Games* or the *Dene Games*, indicate as much.

2.4. Classification of Games

A 'classification' of games can, if at all, only be carried out with regard to the distributional properties (structure and volume of different forms of capital) of a given game's or sport's specific instantiation. Unless links between distributional and formal-classificatory aspects can be constructed qua analogy and homology, formal classifications cannot easily be integrated into such a scheme. For example, in a series of influential studies, Roberts and Sutton-Smith construct a formal classification of games according to the means employed to determine the outcome of the game. They arrive at a threefold classification where they distinguish between

(1) *games of physical skill*, in which the outcome is determined by the players' motor activities; (2) *games of strategy*, in which the outcome is determined by rational choices among possible courses of action; and (3) *games of chance*, in which the outcome is determined by guesses or by some uncontrolled artifact such as a die or wheel.⁵⁹

The classification is assigned explanatory significance by way of a cross-cultural, statistical inquiry correlating the classes of games with forms of enculturation, and with 'levels of cultural complexity.'⁶⁰ The deficiency of such functionalist classificatory schemes resides in their treatment of games so classified, as substantially invariable across cultures; they are assumed to invariably function as 'models' of and for social life. But whether the distributional properties of a given game's instantiations are indeed identical across cultures, that is to say, their position within the culturally specific system of games, and within the structure of the social world, cannot be established.⁶¹

This is also true of cooperative games, where players pursuing complementary goals form a coalition wherein specified strategies are formulated in order to create a synchronization of effort so as to permit the achievement of such goals by all of the players concerned.⁶² Even the cooperative structure of a game such as the Gwich'in 'bouncing game', *akàii*—reminiscent of the modern trampoline—was intersected by relations of authority. When the game, as often happened in the old days, was employed as medicine in the context of the caribou hunt, the important act of performing the necessary jumps ('bounces') had to be performed by the medicine man, *dinji dazhan*. His power was actualized in the context of a cooperative endeavour. This brief example indicates that the cooperative nature of a given game instantiation cannot be determined on the basis of formal outcome determinants alone; a consideration of the existing distributional properties can facilitate a clearer analysis.

2.5. Play

A discussion of the concept of play constitutes, as it were, the limiting case for these conceptual considerations, in the sense that through the reconsideration of an argument mentioned above—that play is linked to games and sports by a continuum—the relative position of the terms 'game' and 'sport' can be demarcated more clearly. Huizinga's conceptualization of play has already been

noted. It was seen that his delineation does not facilitate a clear distinction between play and games. Such a distinction is provided by Meier who characterizes play as "a voluntary endeavour which cannot be forced, externally demanded, obligated, or imposed by necessity, coercion or any form of duty ... Second, play is an autotelic activity. That is, play is an intrinsic, non-instrumental, self-contained enterprise which has only internal finalities which do not transcend it. Play is not a means to external ends ... it does not further survival ... or materialistic interests."⁶³ Meier goes beyond Huizinga's in that he delineates the 'play stance' without invoking the existence of rules—the rules of the game form in particular, for that matter—as a necessary condition for its occurrence. Simply stated, not all games need necessarily be 'played.'

Problematic from a cross-cultural—and, one might add, an historical—point of view, however, remains the categorical exclusion of materially productive intentionality from the phenomenon. It will be noted that games, structured by an artificial limitation on technical efficiency, are positioned homologously to play as non-instrumental in Meier's sense. Thus, games and sport are indeed a 'field of the highest possibility' for the occurrence of play, the expression of spontaneity and the experience of freedom. But, as Gruneau points out, to move from such possibility to positing play as a trans-historical constant of the 'human condition' overloads the concept:

Play is clearly a creative and meaningful feature of individual and cultural expressions but it should not be universalized as some trans-historical human essence or abstract form. Rather, play, games and sports are all features of our social being, and as such cannot be conceived independently of the organizing principles, expectations and disappointments which define lived social experience at any given historical moment.⁶⁴

Positive discursive valorizations of play are constituted through an implicit negative valorization qua exclusion of material social production ('external finalities and necessity'). This represents an adequate reflection of the conditions of much work and material production in capitalist social forms, but the generalized assumption that therefore *all* materially productive work assumes negative characteristics such as are ostensibly indicated by the absence of play, is untenable; this line of reasoning structures both Meier's and Huizinga's argument. Historically and cross-culturally, not all material production is structured by the logic of commodity production and capital accumulation,⁶⁵ where the criterion of efficiency of the material aspects of social production is not inherent in the technical process itself, but where it is expressed through the process of extraction of surplus value, and of capital accumulation. The imputed universality of play as the 'true human condition' may well reside in the potential for alienation implicit in this specific form of objectivation of the capitalist productive process. Arguably, large segments of professional sports themselves have been subsumed under this logic while maintaining the formal features outlined above.⁶⁶ It is this exteriorization of the aim of social production brought about through the production of commodities and the resultant commodification of labor (power) under determinate historical conditions, which provides the basis for contradistinctive conceptualizations of play as the unalienated,

'authentic human condition'. Therefore, play is seen to be achievable only in 'non-work' activities.⁶⁷

Based on production for use, that is to say, subsistence production, the structure of technical and material productive efficiency among hunter-foragers, such as the traditional Gwich'in, provides a marked contrast to this specific logic of valorization. Subsistence production is not amenable to the abstractions structurally inherent in the capital and commodity form of value.⁶⁸ In some contemporary foraging societies, to provide but one example, less than four hours a day spent on subsistence production will be sufficient to meet the socially and culturally circumscribed needs of the individual. Sahlins in his famous essay even goes so far as to refer to these groups as the "original affluent society."⁶⁹ The least that can be said is that in the absence of the abstractions and exteriorizations of commodity production, the potential for the occurrence of play need not be limited to the field of games and sports. Likewise, when the arbitrary restrictions on technical efficiency operative in *games* are situated in their cultural and historical contexts, it can be seen that in hunting and foraging societies—characterized by "underproduction,"⁷⁰ that is, by a structurally embedded disregard for 'greatest efficiency'—these restrictions operate on the pragmatic rationality inherent in the technical process of production itself, and as such are not considerations of efficiency as they relate to the extraction of abstract surplus value from technical processes of production.

Endnotes

- 1 See, for example, Alan Guttman, *From Ritual to Record*. The importance of institutional changes is not hereby denied, but such changes stand themselves in need of analysis, they do not themselves constitute explicatory elements. At issue here is the discussion on modernization theory.
- 2 This should not be misconstrued as an endorsement of cultural relativism. Tim Ingold argues in *Evolution and Social Life* that the position which needs to be taken in order to assign all cultural forms relatively equal 'value' can in itself be only one of complete detachment which fails to consider that the very act of taking that position implicates it in the extant power relations; in other words, "there is no way out of the game of culture" (Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 12).
- 3 See, Pierre Bourdieu & Loïc J.D. Wacquant, *Réponses*, pp. 224-231; Pierre Bourdieu, "A Lecture on the Lecture;" idem, *In Other Words*, pp. 177-198; idem, *The Logic of Practice*, pp. 30-42.
- 4 See, Vicki Paraschak, Michael Heine & James McAra, "Native and Academic Knowledge Interests."
- 5 CGLP, L29/4, Jim Edwards, *Christmas Long Ago*.
- 6 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*; idem, *The Logic of Practice*; Pierre Bourdieu & Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction*.
- 7 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 467.
- 8 Pierre Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice*, p. 52.
- 9 Pierre Bourdieu, *Zur Soziologie der symbolischen Formen*, pp. 125-158.
- 10 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 169ff. In relocating the analysis of class into the habitus, Bourdieu breaks with traditional class analysis which mainly addresses the problem of the constitution of class consciousness (see, Klaus Eder, "Klassentheorie als Gesellschaftstheorie").
- 11 Pierre Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice*, p. 52ff.
- 12 See, Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*, in particular pp. 41-99; Richard Slobodin, *Band Organization*, p. 45.
- 13 Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, pp. 164ff.
- 14 CGLP, L4/10, Lucy Vaneltsi, *Traditional Life #2*.
- 15 See, Michael Asch, "Capital and Economic Development."
- 16 See, Gary Juniper, *The State, Natives and the Economy of the NWT*.
- 17 It is doubtful that many of the children were 'educated' in any sense meaningful to the concerns of people in McPherson or Old Crow at that time.
- 18 Pierre Bourdieu & J.-C. Passeron, *Reproduction*, passim. 'Arbitrary' is used here as a noun.
- 19 Pierre Bourdieu & J.-C. Passeron, *Reproduction*, p. 8.
- 20 Pierre Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice*, p. 131.
- 21 Pierre Bourdieu & J.-C. Passeron, *Reproduction*, p. 8.
- 22 Pierre Bourdieu, "The School as a Conservative Force," p. 39.
- 23 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 387. Bourdieu does not argue that this precludes social mobility, which in fact "is not incompatible with the permanence of structures (of relations between classes)" (Pierre Bourdieu, "Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction," p. 71).
- 24 See, Richard Morlan, "Kutchin Prehistory."
- 25 See, Pierre Bourdieu, "Penser relationnellement."
- 26 The historical importance of the institutionalization of the educational system is not hereby denied. Bourdieu makes the following observation in a different context, but it also summarizes an important principle of traditional Gwich'in social organization, i.e., its flexibility. Positions of authority, such as they were, were occupied only temporary, they could not appeal to institutional permanence for implicit validation of their authority: "... the holders of educationally uncertified cultural capital can always be required to prove themselves, because they are only what they do..." (Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 23). This was to change for the first time with the arrival of missionaries who derived some of their authority from the institution they represented.
- 27 June Helm & David Damas, "Contact-Traditional All-Native Community of the Canadian North."
- 28 Pierre Bourdieu & J.-C. Passeron, *Reproduction*, p. 44.
- 29 The conflict over the forms of education (familial vs. institutional) briefly referred to above is an example of this.
- 30 Pierre Bourdieu, *Sozialer Raum und Klassen*, p. 10ff.

- 31 See, Cornelia Bohn, *Habitus und Kontext*, p. 22ff.
- 32 Pierre Bourdieu, "Ökonomisches Kapital."
- 33 Pierre Bourdieu, "Ökonomisches Kapital," p. 187.
- 34 Cornelius Osgood, *Ethnography of the Kutchin*, p. 108.
- 35 See, Hans-Peter Müller, *Sozialstruktur und Lebensstile*, p. 268ff.
- 36 Cornelius Osgood, *Ethnography of the Kutchin*, pp. 108, 123, 129.
- 37 Richard Slobodin, "Kutchin," p. 524.
- 38 Pierre Bourdieu, "Ökonomisches Kapital," p. 183.
- 39 Roland Scollon, *Context of the Informant Narrative Performance*.
- 40 See, for example, Sheppard Krech, *Changing Trapping Patterns in Ft. McPherson, NWT*; Michael Asch, "Capital and Economic Development."
- 41 Axel Honneth, "Die zerrissene Welt der symbolischen Formen," p. 150.
- 42 Charles Suaud, "Espace des sports, espace social et effets d'âge."
- 43 See, Jacques Defrance, "Un schisme sportif." It cannot be assumed that a given sport in general, for example, 'the' role of football, occupies a determinate position within the field. Depending on the social context, different instantiations of the same sport can produce quite distinct structures of signification (see, Anne Marie Wader, "Le marché des partenaires").
- 44 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 208.
- 45 Pierre Bourdieu, "Program for a Sociology of Sport;" idem, "Sport and Social Class."
- 46 See, Vicki Paraschak, *Heterotransplantation of Organized Sport*; idem, *Discrepancies Between Government Programs and Community Practices*.
- 47 Roger Cailliois, *Man, Play and Games*; Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*; John M. Roberts & Brian Sutton-Smith, "Games in Culture;" John M. Roberts et al., "Child Training and Game Involvement."
- 48 Edward Norbeck, "The Study of Play—Johan Huizinga and Modern Anthropology." For an overview of these developments, see, R. Gerald Glassford, *Application of a Theory of Games*; Helen Schwartzman, *Transformations*.
- 49 Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, p. 28.
- 50 Janet Harris, "Beyond Huizinga," pp. 26-27.
- 51 Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, "Some Paradoxes in the Definition of Play," p. 19.
- 52 Bernard Suits, *The Grasshopper*, p. 41.
- 53 Klaus V. Meier, "Inadequacies of Sociological Definitions of Sport," p. 93.
- 54 Robert J. Paddick, "Review Essay: 'The Grasshopper. Games, Life and Utopia'," pp. 36-38.
- 55 Suits conceptualizes this distinction by referring to the goal of a game as the "lusory goal", to the identical end-state of an activity brought about by other means, as the "prelusory goal" (*The Grasshopper*, p. 37 ff.).
- 56 Bernhard Suits, *The Grasshopper*, p. 38.
- 57 Anne-Marie Wader, "Le marché de partenaires," p. 2 ff.
- 58 See, David Whitson, "Structure, Agency, and the Sociology of Sport Debates," p. 101.
- 59 John M. Roberts & Brian Sutton-Smith, "Child Training and Games Involvement," p. 166. See, Garry Chick, "On the Categorization of Games," pp. 285-286. The classification does have a certain utility for the present discussion; it facilitates the positioning of the term 'sport' within the discourse of the anthropology of sport, where it is largely congruent with Roberts' & Sutton-Smith's 'games of physical skill.'
- 60 See, Philip Townsend, "Games of Strategy;" John M. Roberts, "Comment on 'Games of Strategy'."
- 61 Doubt is also cast on the explanatory force of the model when one considers that, for example, even three clubs offering the same sport within one community occupy distinctly different positions within the field of sport of that community (see, Anne Marie Wader, "Le marché de partenaires"). A similar critique is provided by Suzanne Laberge & Yvan Gerardin, "Questioning the Inference of Ethnic Differences in Achievement Values From Types of Sport Participation."
- 62 R. Gerald Glassford, "Cultural-Anthropological Approach," p. 4.
- 63 Klaus V. Meier, "An Affair of Flutes," p. 25.
- 64 Richard S. Gruneau, "Freedom and Constraint," p. 83.
- 65 A formal discussion of the problem in question is carried out by George A. Cohen, *Karl Marx' Theory of History*.

- 66 For a concise summary of the argument, see, Rob Beamish, "Sport and the Logic of Capitalism."
- 67 See, Michael Heine, *Der Potlatch als Spiel*.
- 68 This is not to say that hunter-gatherers do not engage in commodity exchange. It is, however, more appropriate to refer to such limited local practices as 'barter;' see, Stuart Plattner, "Markets and Marketplaces," esp. pp. 179 ff.; Maurice Godelier, *The Production of Great Men*, pp. 12-13; idem, *Perspectives in Marxist Anthropology*, pp. 23-91.
- 69 Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*, pp. 1-40.
- 70 Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*, p. 100ff.

CHAPTER 3

GWICH'IN COUNTRY

The people had to go a long ways and had to do travelling ... it was nice and clean ground through the mountains. The country looked so beautiful ...

— Roddy Peters

The Tukudh don't invite one to their feasts but whoever goes is welcome and if a stranger all the more so.

— Kenneth McDonald, 2 April 1876

Gwich'in is a self-designation used by members of the most northerly Native culture on the American continent.¹ Traditionally, the *Gwich'in* were nomadic hunter-gatherers of the subarctic boreal forest, a broad expanse of woodland stretching across most of Canada and Alaska, bounded by the temperate forest on the south, and on the north by the treeless tundra, beyond which lies the high arctic. The north-western part of this area is inhabited by a far-flung family of distinct Native cultures commonly referred to in anthropological reckoning as Athapaskans. The *Gwich'in* belong to this group as do neighboring peoples such as the Mountain people, the Slavey, Chipewyan, Dogrib, Han, and Tanana, to name just a few. *Gwich'in* country extends from the Mackenzie Delta in the Northwest Territories west through northern Yukon Territory into interior Alaska. It is bounded to the North by the treeline, a biological as well as a cultural marker, separating *Gwich'in* country from the territory of their northern neighbors, the Inuit.

The *Gwich'in* divide themselves into eight bands, although at the time of contact a ninth band probably inhabited the far western range of *Gwich'in* country. Each band is associated with a particular territory, usually centering on a river or riverine system, and they all speak dialects of the *Gwich'in* language. Alaskan Native speakers (*Gwich'in* among them) occasionally use the self-designation 'Athapaskan,' or 'Athabascan,' employing the anthropological classification based on linguistic criteria and extending the reference from the language to the respective cultures. This is rarely if ever done in Yukon or the Northwest Territories. The term 'Loucheux,' used by older *Gwich'in* speakers on the Canadian side, is gradually falling into disuse.² A political collective

self-designation which has been used by the Athapaskan-speaking peoples of the Northwest Territories during the last 20 years, is *Dene*.

1. The Land

Gwich'in country straddles the Arctic Circle. It extends from about 65° north latitude to about 68°, and from 138° longitude to about 149°. That is to say, from the Mackenzie River Delta in the east it extends about 900 air-kilometers west to the upper reaches of the Koyukuk River in Alaska. Towards the north-west, it extends into the Brooks Range, while towards the northeast it stretches to within 150 kilometers of the Arctic Ocean, following approximately along the tree line. The overall north-south extension of the area is about 400 km.

Gwich'in country is an area of great seasonal contrasts. Ice and snow are a dominant feature of the landscape for almost eight months of the year. Winters are long and cold, and in January and February—the coldest period of the year—the temperature can drop to minus 50° Celsius or lower for extended periods of time. Since much of the territory lies north of the Arctic Circle, winter days are not only cold but also dark. For about two weeks during mid- and late December, the sun does not rise, and what little daylight there may be is limited to about three or four hours of indirect and diffuse light over the horizon. These are the 'dark days,' the short days of winter, *khah zhak*. Yet temperatures and the weather permitting, winter was also the time of travelling and moving on the land. The ground is hard, and the rivers and lakes are frozen, rendering travel on foot or by dog team an efficient mode of transportation.

Break-up, *daii*, marks the end of winter and the beginning of a short spring. The days are getting perceptibly longer around the end of February, and by the end of April daylight is almost continuous. Summer, *shin*, is the other major season of the annual cycle, and in many ways an inverse image of winter time. For a short period during July, the sun shines for 24 hours. The days are hot and sunny, interrupted only by the occasional shower; temperatures often climb into the thirties. Among the traditional Gwich'in, much of this time was spent at the fish camps, travelling was reduced to a minimum and occurred mainly on the rivers. Summer also brings the greatest inconvenience in the seasonal cycle, not heat nor cold, but "the much-remarked insect life of the north ... pestiferous mosquitoes, flies, and other species of small biting things."³ The end of summer is marked by a brief fall leading to freeze-up, *nagwidik'ih*, marking the beginning of winter and the completion of the seasonal cycle. Travelling on either river or land is at its most difficult during break-up and freeze-up.

The land is for the most part covered by the boreal forest, consisting of pine, alder, willow, birch, and spruce as the dominant species. The trees in the more northerly regions tend to be quite small, because the growing season is so short. The forests are interspersed with muskegs, meadows, and with the numerous lakes and streams providing a habitat for the various species of fish which are of importance for the subsistence economy. The treeline at this latitude lies at 400m above sea



Map 1 The Treeline
A Cultural Boundary

level, and the mountainous areas of Gwich'in country, such as the Richardson Mountains or the Brooks Range, take on the character of the tundra and Barren Grounds rather than the boreal forest. This contrasts greatly with the aspect of the country around the lowland plains of the Yukon Flats and the Mackenzie Delta.

Much of the area lies within the zone of discontinuous permafrost. Permafrost slows the rate of decomposition of vegetable matter, thus reducing the return of nutrients to the soil and shortening the growing season. Due to its location north of the arctic circle, the area receives a fairly low amount of solar energy during the year, and the natural reproduction of vegetation remains below the level found in most areas of the world. This, in conjunction with the presence of snow for the greater part of the year, also limits the carrying capacity and thus the level of reproduction of animal species dependent on vegetable foods.⁴ This fact had important ramifications for the structure of Gwich'in society, because traditionally the Gwich'in were largely dependent on these animals.

Although the Gwich'in utilized almost every type of edible plant, fish and land animals constituted the staple foods. The characteristic animals of Gwich'in country include moose; caribou (in most areas); black, brown and grizzly bear; sheep in mountainous sections; beaver, land otter, muskrat; mink and weasel. For daily subsistence throughout the year, fish and small mammals such as hares, beaver, porcupines caught in babiche (rawhide) snares or deadfalls were utilized. Of paramount importance for the traditional subsistence economy was, however, the caribou, *vadzaih*: "... in their own eyes the Kutchin were 'people of the deer'."⁵

The caribou herd which since at least the middle of the last century has provided many of the Gwich'in groups with their staple food has in modern days come to be referred to as the 'Porcupine Herd.'⁶ It consists of Grant caribou which, like all species of caribou, lead a migratory life, constantly moving across vast expanses of boreal forest and tundra. The range of this herd extends from the Richardson and northern Mackenzie Mountains across Yukon Territory into Alaska, almost to Fairbanks in the southwest and Prudhoe Bay on the coast of the Beaufort Sea in the northwest. The main wintering areas are the Chandalar River, Ogilvie Mountains, and Richardson Mountains ranges. By the end of April and early May, the animals begin to move northwards towards the remote calving grounds on the Yukon and Alaskan coast of the Beaufort Sea. Calving occurs in late May and early June, after which time the animals constantly move across the northern range of their habitat, usually in small groups. The movement during June and July may well be caused by the relentless assault of the mosquitoes which, during this time, constitute a severe stress factor for the animals. August has been called the 'caribou vacation.' The mosquitoes have largely disappeared, and the caribou feed and wander at their leisure. Thus, prior to, and early in rutting season, the caribou are in their prime. The southward migration towards the wintering ranges begins around the end of October, completing the seasonal migration route. For the Gwich'in, this was (and is) also the time of the fall hunt, one of the most important events of the year because much of the country food which would see the group through the winter was harvested during this time.

Fall was also the major season for hunting moose. In terms of cultural importance, if not perhaps in terms of its relevance for subsistence, the moose equalled the caribou.⁷ The moose, unlike the caribou, is a solitary animal for the greater part of the year, and great knowledge and technical expertise are required of a good hunter. Traditionally, moose hunting expertise was highly valued in Gwich'in society, and it constituted a means for the acquisition of social and symbolic capital; this is a point to which I shall return. A detailed description of moose hunting techniques among the Draanjik Gwich'in has been provided by Nelson;⁸ no further outline needs to be given at this point. John Fredson, reminiscing about the attractions of the moose hunt for the Neets'aiti Gwich'in during the early decades of this century, provides an indication of the cultural importance of the activity: "Whoever we give the moose to always cooks it ... fter we eat, we all tell stories and sometimes we dance. ... It is always a lot of work for us, but when we are young men, it is very pleasant for us to hunt it."⁹

A variety of other animals were utilized during the annual round. Their importance for the subsistence economy has been examined by a number of authors,¹⁰ and this overview can be concluded by drawing attention to two important points which emerge from the description so far. The first concerns the ecological adaptation of the Gwich'in subsistence economy to the pressures of the severe subarctic environment. Due to the heavy reliance on the caribou, traditional Gwich'in society was characterized by a degree of mobility immediately linked to that of the caribou

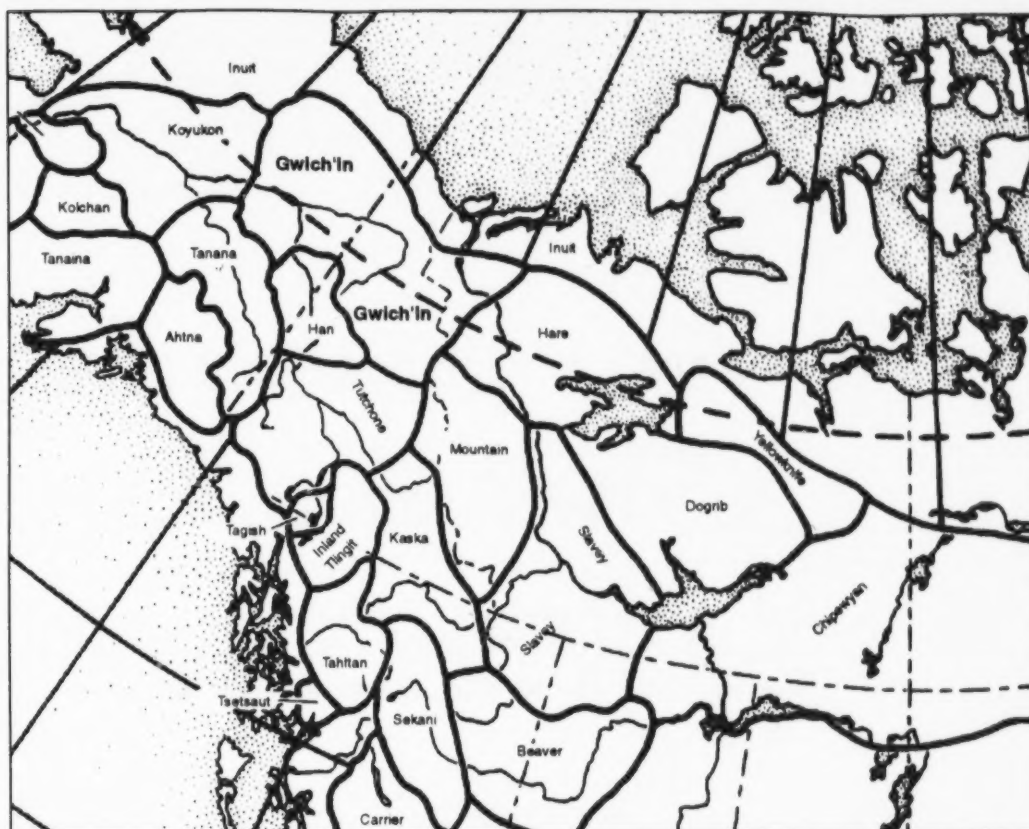
herds.¹¹ The cultural valorization of this link was expressed through the great emphasis placed on movement, which permeated all spaces of Gwich'in culture and life. Movement, 'travelling,' was a cultural *topos* consisting of various sub-themes, reaching far beyond pragmatically necessary considerations as they were related to the caribou or moose hunt, into areas as diverse as historical mythology, present political strategies, and, as will be seen, the space of traditional games. The second point to emphasize is that the movement of the caribou herds, although in general terms following broadly repetitive patterns, is, from year to year, highly mutable: "...the unpredictable choices of migration routes and seasonal ranges leave many predators (including man) waiting in the wrong place at the wrong time. In fact, the survival tactic has bewildered generations of scientists and hunters."¹² Such unpredictability implies the second 'structuring structure' of traditional Gwich'in society—a high degree of flexibility which was evident in various domains, and which was articulated in cultural terms in interpersonal relations as well as in the overall social structure.

2. The People

To southerners, *oonjit*, Gwich'in have been known by various names. The people on the Canadian side for a time called themselves 'Loucheux.' This French term, which came into use during the fur trade period is itself a translation of the Chipewyan name for the Gwich'in, meaning either 'sharp-eyed' or 'slant-eyed.'¹³ The term is gradually falling into disuse, and only older people will use it regularly. The term generally used in the anthropological literature is 'Kutchin';¹⁴ the modern preferred spelling is Gwich'in.

This, however, is not traditional usage. The term implies a degree of, as it were, 'national' unity which was not a part of traditional social organization, although culturally "the Kutchin as a whole are rather sharply bounded, both by the relative distinctiveness of their language in the Athapaskan family and by a strong consciousness of kind among Gwich'in speakers."¹⁵ The term *dinji zhuh*, 'small' or 'short person', is used in Gwich'in for any Native person (in distinction from European or Inuit), and may on certain occasions be used to refer to the Gwich'in in general, but traditionally the meaningful identification was with the band or subgroup and the territory it inhabited. This is expressed by adding 'Gwich'in', literally 'dwellers of,' to the term designating geographical location. Thus, Neets'ait Gwich'in are the dwellers of the hills in the Chandalar River area. People from Fort McPherson are Teet'it Gwich'in, 'dwellers at the head of the waters' (Teet'it being the term designating the head waters of the Peel River, the original habitat of the Peel River people); Fort McPherson is still referred to by its original name, 'Peel River House'—*teet'it zheh*.

Any estimation of the demographic structure of Gwich'in society prior to contact can at best be approximate. Krech argues that the pre-contact population amounted to probably 5400 people.¹⁶ The census estimate by the Department of Indian Affairs some 50 years after the initial contact, set the number at 2600.¹⁷ Thomas Canham, the Anglican missionary at Fort McPherson between 1882 and 1888, certainly noted a "great diminution during the past century in the number of native



Helm (ed.) 1981:ix

Map 2 Northern Athapaskan Groups

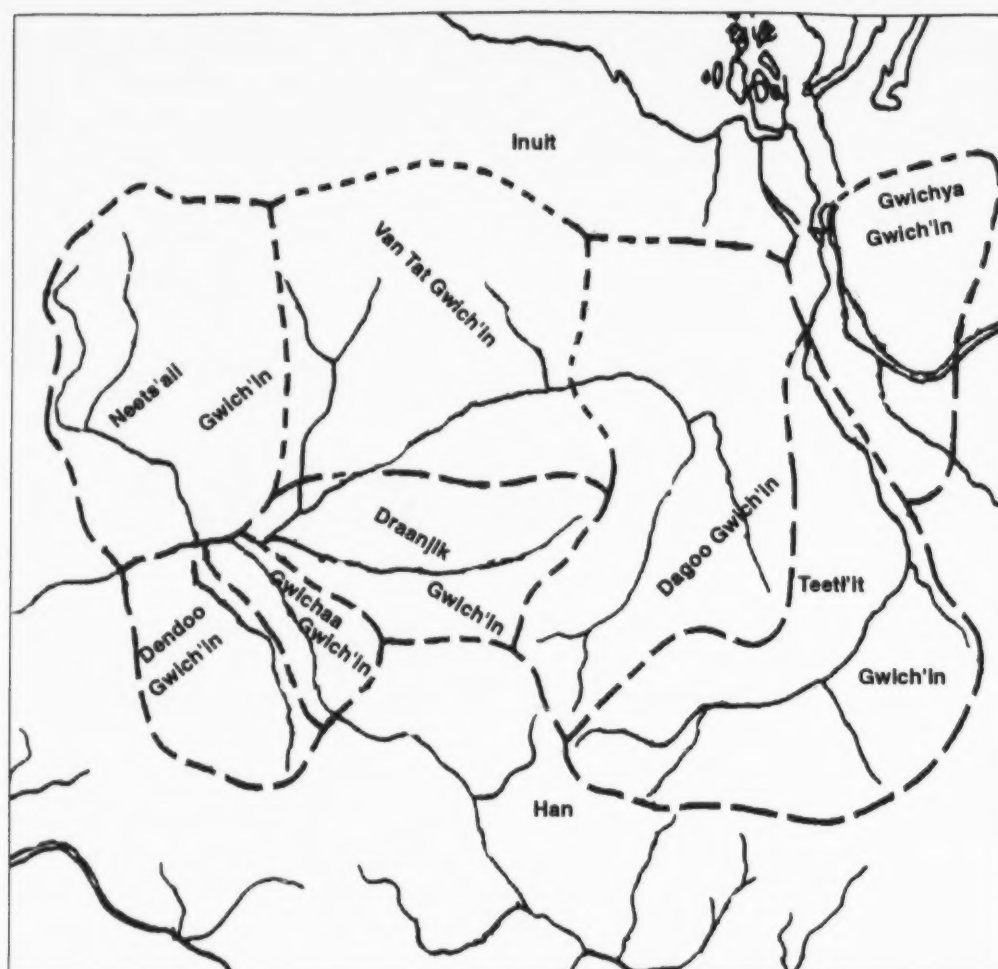
inhabitants,"¹⁸ and the post journals from Fort Yukon, Fort McPherson, and Fort Good Hope contain numerous references to epidemics.¹⁹

2.1. Regional Bands

At the time of contact, eight of these regional groupings existed.²⁰ A ninth, the Dihaii Gwich'in, had probably been pushed off their traditional territory by the Inuit some time prior to the first contact between Gwich'in and European explorers and fur traders. The survivors moved eastward and joined the Neets'aii and Gwichaa Gwich'in.²¹ Each of these bands inhabited a territory centered on a river or a riverine system.

Gwichyah Gwich'in: Their range centered on the Arctic Red River, the Mackenzie River at the head of the Mackenzie Delta up the Travaillant River, extending eastward towards Anderson River.²²

Teet'it Gwich'in: The Teet'it, or Peel River, Gwich'in lived in the area of the head of the Peel River, from there east into the Richardson Mountains, and east towards Hart, Blackstone and Bon-



Osgood 1934:170

Map 3 Gwich'in Country and Regional Groups in the 19th Century

netplume Rivers in what is now Yukon Territory. For the 20 or 30 years following the Klondike goldrush, a significant number of Teetl'it Gwich'in oriented their lives towards Dawson City.

Dagoo Gwich'in: The inhabitants of the Upper Porcupine River area, in particular of the mountainous regions of the rivers's headwaters. According to historical mythology, the Dagoo are supposed to be the oldest group of the Gwich'in, from whom all other groups descended. They were also called 'Rat Indians' by the early traders. This has led to some confusion in the older literature where the Van Tat Gwich'in were sometimes referred to by this name also.

Van Tat Gwich'in: The Crow River Gwich'in—'those who dwell among the lakes'—lived along the middle reaches of the Porcupine and along the upper section of the Old Crow River which

drains into the Porcupine in the vicinity of the village of Old Crow. The area north of the Porcupine along Old Crow River, the Crow Flats, is dotted with a multitude of lakes. During certain periods of the fur trade era, this was an important ratting area.²³

Draanjik Gwich'in: 'Those who dwell along the river,' the river in question being the Black River. Trader Dan Cadzow of Rampart House referred to the Black River Gwich'in as 'Cache River People,' a name apparently derived from the great number of caches the people would put up along the river.²⁴

Gwichaa Gwich'in: The inhabitants of the Yukon Flats area along the middle Yukon River downstream to about the mouth of Chandalar River or Birch Creek. The river in this area takes on the characteristics of a lake rather than a river, being more than 20km wide in places, dotted with numerous sandy islands.²⁵

Dendoo Gwich'in: The inhabitants of the area along Birch Creek, west of the upper Yukon Flats. Birch Creek drains into the Yukon about 40km below the mouth of the Porcupine. The Birch Creek Gwich'in were essentially a mountain people, being more closely linked to the Neets'ait than the Gwichaa Gwich'in in this regard. An epidemic brought in by the fur traders in about 1863, devastated the Dendoo and essentially led to the demise of the group.

Neets'ait Gwich'in: This group was referred to by the early fur traders as 'Gens du Large,' 'people of the open country,' an appropriate designation for the country north of the Chandalar River which opens out into the Brooks Range. This mountainous environment largely shaped the culture of the Neets'ait Gwich'in; to other Gwich'in the Chandalar people were known to possess great strength and endurance "as a consequence of a strenuous life"²⁶ in the more mountainous and harsher areas of the Brooks Range country. 'Gens du Large' was corrupted to 'Chandalar', which became the name of the river, and, by association, of the people living to the north thereof.

The Gwich'in were unified by an awareness of the homogeneity of their culture in distinction from that of their neighbors (made evident most clearly by the distinctiveness of their language), but there existed, at the same time, an awareness of internal cultural distinctions which reinforced the degree of local cultural identity by clearly demarcating adjacent regional groups. It was further indicated by differences in dialect as well as, for example, conceptions held about what constituted the typical *hexis* for members of different groups. The Rev. David Salmon, for example, explaining to me some of the differences between the groups as he sees them, also described the Neets'ait Gwich'in as people of great physical strength. Further, distinctions based on the degree of elaborateness of the respective dialects of Gwich'in, as well as aspects of what Bourdieu has termed the *hexis*, the bodily comportment exhibited during such mundane tasks as eating or walking, were discussed. The description of these idiosyncracies gave Rev. Salmon an opportunity to crack a good many jokes.²⁷

The relationship between the traditional territorial groupings and the modern communities is represented in tabular form in Figure 5. The distribution of the bands across the respective regional

Regional Group	English Name	Other Designations	Principal Communities
Gwichyah	Arctic Red River People	Nagwichoonjik	Arctic Red River
Teet'it	Peel River People	Loucheux	Fort McPherson (Inuvik, Aklavik)
Dagoo	Upper Porcupine People	Tukkuh, Rat Indians	Fort Yukon
Van Tat	Crow Flats People	Vunta, VunTut	Old Crow
Draanjik	Black River People		Chalkyitsik
Gwichaa	Yukon Flats People	Kutchu	Fort Yukon, Circle, Birch Creek, Beaver
Dendoo	Birch Creek People		
Neets'au	Chandalar River People	Gens du Large	Arctic Village, Venetie
Dihaii	('the far people')		

Figure 5 Gwich'in Regional Groupings and Modern Communities

territories has undergone considerable changes. The process leading to the formation of villages set in with the fur trade and the work of the missionaries, but led to a significant shift from the bush to the town only during and after the 1940s, when the inception of state-organized educational, health and administrative programs in conjunction with the collapse of the fur trade, induced people to stay in the communities rather than the bush for extended periods of time. Children born around 1960 are of the first generation to have grown up primarily in the villages, and have been socialized into a far more sedentary life-style. The recent advent of modern telecommunications and the intensification of road and air communications have exacerbated this dichotomy between bush and town. At the same time, a strong individual identification with the local group has remained.

2.2. Travelling

The heavy reliance on the caribou as the dominant local food source in conjunction with the extant productive forces and the range of storage technologies at hand, constituted mobility as one of the underlying conditions of existence and reproduction of Gwich'in society. However, in order to convey a notion of the cultural valuation placed on what, in ecological terms, appears as a mere technical necessity inescapable for semi-nomadic hunter-gatherers—that is, adaptationally determined movement on the land—this subsection is titled 'travelling.' Culturally, travelling on the land was so highly valued among Gwich'in that bland reference to movement in its ecological determination does scant justice to its importance as cultural practice.

The high degree of mobility structuring work in the economic field can best be clarified by considering the Gwich'in seasonal cycle. Historical information about the pre-contact period (prior to 1840) is obviously scant; consistent information is available only beginning with the 'contact-traditional'²⁸ period (1840-1898²⁹). The old-timers who discussed the old way of life with Slobodin

during the latter's field work in the 1940's referred to the late phase of the contact-traditional period as 'the old days,' and the massive collection of stories compiled through the *COPE Gwich'in Language Project* deals, in part, with the end of that period. By that time, certain changes had already taken hold in the local economy. Indeed, as Ugarenko points out, the ramifications of the fur trade were evident in Gwich'in country long before Bell and Murray established trading posts at Fort Yukon and on the Peel, most notably in the form of changed patterns of trade relationships.³⁰ On the other hand, while the trade goods introduced through and prior to the fur trade altered certain properties of the economic field within a relatively short period of time, most notably through the introduction of steel tools (traps and axes) and, indeed, of commercial trapping itself, these changes did not, during much of the contact-traditional period, lead to analogous changes in the distributional properties of other fields, among which can be grouped the domain of traditional games. The initially limited influence of the trading post on the seasonal cycle is explained by the remoteness of Fort McPherson from the original heart land of the Teetł'it Gwich'in. The post was accessible to the Gwich'in for only a short period in early summer. By mid-summer, the people left for the mountains in order to arrive in time for the fall caribou hunt. Caribou surrounds could not be used in the wooded areas of the Peel lowlands around Fort McPherson; they were set up above the tree line in the high valleys of the Ogilvie and Richardson Mountains, "between Sheep Creek and Bear Creek on one flat."³¹ The movement of the caribou herds as well as the prevailing weather conditions restricted the use of the surround to late fall and early winter.³² Furthermore, subsistence hunting remained more important than commercial trapping, for several decades subsequent to the establishment of Fort McPherson. For the greater part of the year, therefore, the Gwich'in retreated to their traditional home land, and followed the traditional seasonal cycle.³³ Significant changes did not occur until after the commencement of missionary activities in the 1860s, and after the even later acquisition of repeating rifles in the wake of the Klondike gold rush. The muzzle loaders available through the trading post were in general considered to be unsuitable for moose or caribou hunt, and bow and arrow may well have been in use almost until the turn of the century. As one old-timer put it:

Before the gun ever came into this country, all the people used was bow and arrow. A person that bought this gun went out hunting. He made his first shot: He shot a caribou. When he made his first shot he made too much noise, and the caribou started running away, so the people told him, 'put the gun away'— it made too much noise ... Then the people went back to their bows and arrows and got more caribou than [with] the gun.³⁴

The contact-traditional period can be regarded as an approximate base line for analysis. In terms of the distributional properties of the social space overall, the position of the field of games had not changed significantly. Mobility (i.e., living and travelling on the land) and flexibility (that is, little hierarchization in the social structure, and a dominant concern with sharing and cooperation) then, as before, were ordering structures of the social space. An analysis of the field of games as it was

positioned during the contact-traditional period will therefore put into sharper contrast the changes occurring subsequently.

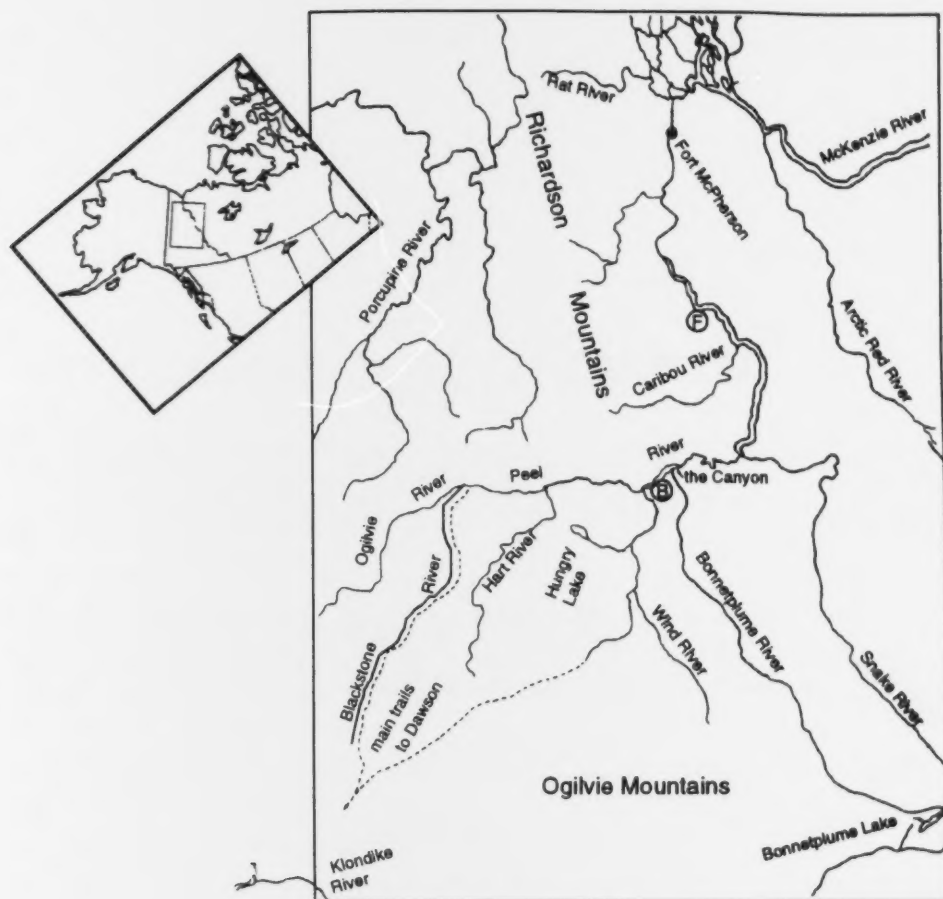
2.2.1. The Seasonal Cycle

The mountainous area comprising the northern part of the Ogilvie Mountains and the western Richardson Mountains was the wintering ground of the Teetłit Gwich'in before the arrival of European merchants and missionaries. The time was spent in the mountains on both sides of the Yukon - Mackenzie divide. The location of the population within this territory, its concentration in large groups or scattering in small ones, and the movement or localization of groups depended primarily upon faunal conditions. The movements of the migrating caribou herds were the principal factor, but trapping conditions played some part, as fur was of some importance to the Gwich'in, both for domestic use and for intertribal trade.

Until late fall, the members of the band were dispersed in smaller groups travelling along the expected migration routes of the caribou. When caribou were found in larger numbers, several of the smaller scattered groups joined to form larger ones. These were similar to what became later referred to as the 'meat camps.' These larger groups usually operated in early winter, hunting caribou on a large scale with the help of 'caribou fences' or 'surrounds.'³⁵ Two rows of poles, sometimes extending for more than two kilometers along the anticipated migration route of the herd, were set up by lashing the poles to trees or anchoring them in the brush. They converged at the actual 'surround,' a brushy area of several hundred meters diameter, where snares had been set. The caribou, guided towards the corral by the converging lines of poles, and pushed forward from behind and the sides by the women and children of the group, were killed by the hunters positioned on the perimeter of the corral, with spears, and bows and arrows. Under favorable conditions, the surround yielded the largest harvest the traditional subsistence economy could produce. The group resided in the area of the caribou kill for as long as provisions lasted, following behind the migrating herds when stocks had been depleted, ready to break up into smaller units when the hunting endeavors did not meet with success.

Caribou fences remained in use until at least 1895 or 1896.³⁶ They were replaced by the repeating rifle, which turned the caribou hunt, in its technical aspects, into a more individualistic and solitary endeavor. As Albert Tritt of Fort Yukon put it: "When the people got some rifles they all went separate. That was the year they first seen rifles, 1890. Since that they never travel together."³⁷ The fundamental principles of cooperation and communality, however, were retained, expressed through sharing and generalized reciprocity. Likewise, mobility remained an integral part of this mode of subsistence. As before, the group moved across the land in search of the migrating herds, following the established trails throughout the seasonal cycle.³⁸

Moose, as has been noted above, were sometimes snared, but in general the moose hunt was a more difficult, and also more individualistic, task. One of the skills of the moose hunt transposable into the domain of games, and one which is frequently mentioned when old-timers reminisce about



after Slobodin 1962:8

Map 4 Contact-Traditional Teet'it Gwich'in Territory

F: 'Fish Trap Head'; B: 'Bubbling Up'

the old days, was athletic endurance. Hunters who were also strong runners were able to run down a moose on the crusted but soft snow of late winter. The animal would be slowed by breaking through the snow, while the hunters, using the large hunting snowshoes, glided along on top of the snow, not unlike cross-country skiers. The functional link between this way of hunting and long-distance running is immediately apparent. For old-timers the valorization of running races, obversely, was invariably linked to the importance of endurance in subsistence hunting.³⁹

One of the major areas for the establishment of winter camps has been identified as 'Bubbling Up' (Map 4, point 'B'), a turbulent stretch of the Peel about 336km from its mouth, containing a number of hot springs (hence the name). Depending upon the availability of caribou, several groups joined to form one the large winter camp. During Chief Julius' time, ten to twenty families frequently stayed in the area, and occasionally almost the entire band.⁴⁰ By late winter, lack of

supplies often forced the break-up of the camp, and smaller groups dispersed into different directions in pursuit of game. Late winter was the time when the danger of starvation was greatest.

Before break-up, the group moved down the lower Peel, towards one of various meeting points. The combined groups would then travel to one of several favorite fishing spots on the rivers of the area for the spring fishery. This was a favorite time of year during which the traditional games were played. The days were warm and sunny, and the mosquitoes had not yet made their appearance. By late spring or early summer, construction of the famous mooseskin boats began. The frame was made from spruce, untreated moose skins were used for the cover. Depending on the size of the group travelling, from eight to twelve or even sixteen skins were required to complete one boat.⁴¹ A large mooseskin boat could be up to ten meters long. Several families cooperated in the construction of the boat, the men making the frame while the women sewed together the skins. Sometimes, the skins which had been used for the winter lodges (Figure 1) were used for the boats.

Slobodin states that the trips down the Peel came to an end in 1923, when more people took up muskrat trapping in the Delta instead of going hunting in the mountains.⁴² The Anglican mission journal for that year indeed notes the arrival of "Chief Julius & his party...from up the river in a skin boat made from 10 mooseskins" on 1 June 1923. Three days later, "John Martin & Benjamin Kendi arrive[d] in 2 skin boats with large party each."⁴³ Neil Colin, on the other hand, explained to me that the last mooseskin boats went down the Peel in 1927. In the summer of 1928, an epidemic swept the Mackenzie valley and delta, killing many people in the communities from Hay River to Aklavik. Gwich'in view this disaster as one of the major causes of the weakening of the old ways, expressed *inter alia* by the cessation of the trips down the Peel in mooseskin boats. A further influencing factor may have been that in 1927 the caribou herds for the first time migrated east of the Richardson Mountains, in closer proximity to Fort McPherson than previously; "they have come ever since," Neil Colin points out.

The terminus of the boat trips, and one of the main meeting points for the summer gatherings was an area along the left bank of the Peel from 'Fish Trap Head' to an island ten kilometers downstream called 'Poplar Grove' (map 4, point 'F'). 'Fish Trap Head' is about 172 kilometers upstream from the mouth of the Peel. Here, large-scale river fishing occurred throughout the summer, and many of the important rituals of the year were held during this period. 'Fish Trap Head' was a major meeting point for many of the families of the band well into the 1870s, after which time Fort McPherson began to take on an increasingly important role as a summer meeting point.⁴⁴ By late summer, the lengthy trek upriver began, ending in the mountains in early fall. The seasonal cycle renewed itself.

Movement on the land, then, was the principle of immediate adaptation to the severe conditions of the subarctic environment. "The Indians spent the whole winter in following the herd of caribou, never remaining in one camping-place for more than about ten days,"⁴⁵ noted George Mitchell who travelled with the group led by chief Francis during the winter of 1898-99. The only period of



Murray 1910:85

Illustration 1 Winter lodge, *nevya zheh*, in 1847-1848.

According to Murray, the lodge was made from caribou skins, but mooseskins were often used as well.

prolonged sedentariness was the time of summer spent at the fish camps; during the greater part of the year, the band and its groups travelled constantly across the land.

There remains to be considered how, internally, the adaptive requirements mediated by mobility were socially, culturally and economically articulated; and how, externally, relations with neighboring groups were maintained. This latter point, however, cannot be understood as an aspect of ecological adaptation, in the strict sense of the term.

2.3. Flexibility

The mobility of subsistence production had its equivalent in a high degree of flexibility in the social arrangements. The general social space was characterized by an almost complete absence of hierarchization, by the transitoriness of membership in many social groupings, and, in terms of the dominant habitus, by a distinct emphasis on individual autonomy paired with interpersonal cooperation. This becomes evident upon examining the distribution of the different forms of capital in the various fields.

2.3.1. Cooperation

Concerning the relations of production it can be noted that the caribou surrounds, the most important means of subsistence production, were owned by individuals; ownership of the surround could be inherited within the family. Yet, as McKennan points out, productive use of the surround was dependent upon voluntary cooperation, they "were of no use to anyone except in connection with a

cooperative caribou drive;"⁴⁶ everybody who cooperated in the caribou drive did so with the certainty that he would receive his share of the kill. The hunt at the caribou surrounds was carried out by what Osgood refers to as the hunting band. The band, according to Osgood, was "plastic, making it possible for certain families to shift their band association during even a single season."⁴⁷ Furthermore, private rights to the use of hunting and fishing grounds existed to a very limited degree only; they were determined by continuity of occupation. Fishing sites were held over from one season to the next, but if the current user chose not to occupy it during the season, it could be taken over by another user. Certain rights derived from extended use of a given hunting site. If a long-time user vacated a site for a season, it could be taken over by another group, but the prior user could return and use the site in cooperation with the more recent arrivals.⁴⁸

Cooperation also structured the relationships within and between the most durable units of economic production, the nuclear family and the "paired family."⁴⁹ The nuclear family was the most important unit of social organization, because "periods of comparative isolation necessitate[d] complete cooperation on part of the members of the family ... under the difficult conditions of semi-nomadism in the cold, interior regions of the far north. This situation ... [tended] to emphasize and strengthen the obvious bonds of family unity."⁵⁰ Paired families constituted residential and economic units made up of the families of two 'partners,' *sijyaa*. Partners provided mutual support and cooperation, particularly in the sharing of proceeds from the moose and caribou hunt; partners' families often occupied a common shelter. The cooperative relationship between partners was a potentially life-long bond, but, depending upon the circumstances, every man was free to associate with someone else for a given task, "... some families ... [were] always changing partners at any time of the year."⁵¹ Structural cohesion of the social space was thus implied by what, from the social agent's point of view, was the very antithesis of institutional permanence, i.e., a high degree of flexibility in the concrete arrangements made under the prevailing circumstances. The habitual emphasis on cooperation and mutuality provided the linking element: "Hospitality between members of the same group ... [went] almost without saying."⁵²

Ranking, however, did exist in the various fields. As was pointed out, this could not have been based to any significant extent on the accumulation of economic capital: "... there is accumulated in most cases very little real property of a lasting nature. Most things can and have to be made periodically by the user."⁵³ In fact, it can be argued that valorization of economic capital could only be realized in its dispensation: sharing and generalized reciprocity. What could be gained through such an act was cultural and symbolic capital, which were the major substratum of rank. Yet the value of these forms of capital themselves was largely determined on the basis of continual immediate reproduction alone; even the potential permanency of ranked social relations did not remain unaffected throughout the trajectory of the social agent's lifetime.

2.3.2. Ranking

Ranking in Gwich'in society was largely based on what could be called meritocratic achievement. Possession of cultural and symbolic—and, to a certain extent, economic—capital divided Gwich'in society into two different strata, i.e., rich and poor. Chiefs occupied positions of authority, shamans position of power. The position of chief occasionally passed from father to son, but in general he was elected by common consent on the basis of practical mastery displayed in endeavors such as war, the hunt, and so forth. If, for example, a hunting chief was unsuccessful in directing the movement of the group towards the caribou herds for an extended period of time, the group might, by tacit consent, turn to another person to assume the leadership position. A chief, therefore, was always rich (that is, successful) and he 'had many relatives' (if not genealogically, then putatively), because the maintenance of the position required the conversion of economic into cultural and symbolic capital, qua sharing and generalized reciprocity—in this process, which attuned interpersonal relations to a large extent to concepts of cooperation and sharing, can be found the condition of existence of one of the major aspect of the generalized habitus of Gwich'in society.⁵⁴ Poor people tended to associate with the more wealthy, i.e., the more knowledgeable and competent person, and to work under his guidance for certain periods of time in return for a share of the proceeds of the communal endeavour in times of hardship. In material terms, consequently, there was little difference between the life-styles of the wealthy and the poor. It has sometimes been remarked that the strategic intent by which a hunter aspired to become a leading person or a hunting chief, motivated him to work harder than his peers. At the same time, poor people were free to enter into alliances with other rich people, should they so choose, that is, to enter into different partnerships or to join other bands and extended families. This did occur fairly frequently, as has been noted above. These flexible, yet ranked, arrangements constituted more or less the structure of the local band.

Distinctions based on age constituted an aspect of ranking which was of similar importance. Position of power held by the medicine man apart, generational authority—embodied in the role and position of the *elder*—constituted probably the only form of institutionalized cultural as well as social capital, fluctuating with the degree of symbolic capital acquired over the trajectory of a person's life, "because their long experience [was] believed to give them superior wisdom."⁵⁵ While relative age was the constitutive element of this position, it could only be fully realized by those who throughout their lives had also accumulated symbolic capital through sharing, generosity, and the display of skills in the fields of subsistence production, war, or trade. The importance of generational seniority is emphasized by Gwich'in kinship terminology. It spans only three ascending generations and puts a marked emphasis on generational ascent: "... it is probable that, except for close kin, people are addressed to simple categories based primarily on age."⁵⁶ Elders occupied an important position in the educational process, that is to say, in the process of cultural reproduction across generations. This is for example indicated by the fact that an old-timer recounting a story from the 'old days' will often indicate its validity through a prefatory statement

such as, 'This story was told to me by my grandfather, when I was a young boy;' generational authority constituted a commission for cultural inculcation. While a certain story might be known by many people, the validity of its reproduction was and is necessarily based on the culturally circumscribed generational authority of the story teller.⁵⁷

2.3.3. *Bush Consciousness*

Certain symbolic oppositions existed which served to express individual social position and status. I will briefly consider them here, because this allows me to introduce the term 'bush consciousness' which well describes the generalized habitus of traditional Gwich'in and other Dene societies. In terms of body symbolism, the wealthy distinguished themselves by wearing clothing heavily adorned with porcupine quills, and necklaces made from dentalium shells.⁵⁸ These items constituted economic capital converted into the outward manifestations of wealth and prestige. The symbolic construction of space, analogously, expressed differences in rank by an opposition between 'centre' and 'periphery.' At the large hunting and fish camps, people of high rank occupied position towards the centre, those of lower rank were distributed towards the periphery.⁵⁹ Spatial categories further served to express degrees of friendship and social proximity such that physical distance indicated social isolation or potential enmity.⁶⁰ The story of Vigwahtral (Vi'tit Gwaatr'al), a Gwich'in 'recluse,' is well-known and has been told on numerous occasions.⁶¹ Vigwahtr'al had lost his wife to a fellow Gwich'in. To avoid further hostility, he left his group and lived in isolation on the upper Porcupine River. Here he was seen on 28 June 1863, standing on the bank of the river, by the Anglican missionary Robert McDonald.⁶² A cycle of 'bushman' stories (*nana'in*) expresses a similar set of significations, equating the unknown and threatening with the spatially distant and socially remote. The Chipewyan, for example, by virtue of the fact that they lived at a considerable distance from Gwich'in country, were sometimes considered to be 'bushmen.'⁶³

These significations mediated symbolically the interrelationship between communality and de-hierarchization, on the one hand, and the tendency towards individual autonomy and the individual strategies to accumulate symbolic cultural and symbolic capital, on the other. This was reflected at the level of personal dispositions by a distinction between a person's 'soft' and the 'hard' qualities. People of wealth and high rank had to demonstrate certain 'hard' qualities, that is to say, self-reliance, "shrewdness, wiliness, and a touch of ruthlessness."⁶⁴ In other words, these were dispositions actualized in the strategic pursuit of wealth and prestige. At the same time, as was pointed out above, the accumulation of prestige necessitated the disposition of economic capital; this was expressed by the social agent's 'soft' qualities, viz., "... generosity and a concern for the common weal. To complete the picture of a Peel River community leader, insouciance, a lighthearted manner, and the display, at least, of modesty are needed."⁶⁵

Proximity and distance, 'hardness' and 'softness' were elements of signification giving symbolic expression to a communal orientation which articulated with an emphasis on individual self-reli-

ance and a concern with prestige as ordering elements of the generalized habitus of traditional Gwich'in culture, and mediating the simultaneous demands of self-reliance and a communal orientation, at the level of individual dispositions. In a study of Chipewyan bush life, Scollon has coined the useful term 'bush consciousness' to describe this aspect of the habitus.⁶⁶ According to Scollon, a habitual avoidance of overt individual comparison in any field of social production is the hallmark of this orientation. It is characterized by a high degree of individuality, especially where mastery of the tasks of subsistence production is concerned. That is to say, an integration of knowledge, competencies, and experience occurs at the level of the individual, 'everybody is his own expert.' There is thus little overt inclination to measure one's performance by the standards of somebody else's achievement: Bush consciousness is "non-intervening."⁶⁷ "The most important thing is never to show anger to Indians, for they do not understand it,"⁶⁸ Michael Mason concluded after having lived in the Fort Yukon and Old Crow area for two years in the early 1920s. Mitchell observed this disposition even in cases of hostilities between members of the group; matters were left to the two opponents: "For them, an affair like that was no business of anybody except the two principals."⁶⁹

2.4. External Relations

The Gwich'in look back on a long and changeful history of warfare and peaceful relations with neighboring peoples such as the Inuit, the Han and the Tutchone. Bay trader Murray thought that hostilities were predominantly caused by conflicts over women;⁷⁰ it is clear to Gwich'in old-timers that warfare with the Inuit was a self-reproducing cycle of revenge and counter-revenge.⁷¹ Krech states that the last encounter resulting in a fatality occurred in 1856,⁷² but according to the Oblate missionary Jean Séguin, Gwichyah Gwich'in travelling to Fort McPherson in August 1867 left their wives and children at Tsiigehtchik (the original site of Arctic Red River), expecting a reprisal by the Inuit for an attack carried out at Anderson River.⁷³ Hostile action on part of a group of Inuit appeared imminent as late as 1901, but on that occasion, "Archdeacon McDonald organised the settlement [Fort McPherson]. He had the young men patrolling the beach, with rifles to hand, and outposts on land and he would allow the women only to go to church on Sundays; he thought the Eskimo, would choose that moment to attack the Fort. ... No Eskimo appeared."⁷⁴ The location of the trading post, situated as it was in the buffer zone between Gwich'in and Inuit territories, may itself have been a causal factor leading to at least seven altercations in the lower Peel River area between 1840 and 1856, but the gradual extension of the fur trade brought hostilities—though not inter-cultural tensions⁷⁵—between Inuit and Gwich'in to a close by 1890.⁷⁶

The fur trade itself had initially caused internal tensions even between bands of Gwich'in competing for trading and positional advantages within the incipient exchange network.⁷⁷ This is reflected in the numerous references to hostilities between Gwich'in bands contained in the old-time stories, but the famous war chiefs around which these stories centre, appear to have come mainly from the Yukon and Alaskan sides. The motivation for intra-Gwich'in war had more to do

with "captives, loot, and honors"⁷⁸ than with the self-reproducing cycles of violence characteristic of eastern Gwich'in - Inuit warfare. Indeed, gaining honor—that is to say, acquiring symbolic capital—may well have been a major motivating force for Gwich'in to engage in such endeavors.

Group encounters on the trail therefore occasioned elaborate greeting rituals to ascertain mutual friendly intentions. Greeting ceremonies between groups consisted of elaborate speeches, songs, dances, and games. When families and smaller groups met, the men on both sides often engaged in wrestling matches, by way of exchanging greetings. When the Inuit commenced regular summer trade excursions to Fort McPherson, these customs were extended into the fur trade in order to neutralize the potential for hostility historically contained in interaction between Gwich'in and Inuit. Organized by Hudson's Bay trader, John Firth, football games and wrestling matches came to be an integral part of the trade meets. These meetings developed into 'Sports Day,' which to this day is held in early July. These developments will be examined in detail in Chapter 5.

2.5. Summary

Mobility was the adaptive strategy developed by Gwich'in to organize their lives in the difficult condition of the harsh and severe subarctic environment. Homologously, the distributional properties of the social space were characterized by flexibility concerning membership in the different social groupings, and a great emphasis on what could be termed an 'egalitarian' social structure. Positions of power were transitory and relatively weakly developed. Following Scollon's terminology, the generalized habitus evident in Gwich'in culture corresponding to these properties of the social space has been referred to as 'bush consciousness,' that is, a general tendency to avoid overt individual comparison in any domain of social life linked to a distinct tendency emphasizing self-reliance and individual autonomy. The bulk of the subsequent chapter will be made up by the argument that the field of traditional games was, in part, structured by homologous sets of habituations.

Endnotes

- 1 As used here, the term 'Native' denotes the aboriginal cultures in Canada and the United States, with the exception of the Inuit and Metis.
- 2 "The *Loucheux* or *Querelleurs* Indians inhabited to the west of, and near the lower part of Mackenzie River. They were very shy and quick sighted, which made the *Voyageurs* say that they could see on both sides at once, and they called them *Loucheux*" (Willard Wentzel, "Letters to the Hon. R. McKenzie," p. 110, 28 February 1814).
- 3 Cornelius Osgood, *Ethnography of the Kutchin*, p. 15.
- 4 Nelson Graburn & B. Steven Strong, *Circumpolar People*, pp. 63-65; Robert Bone, *Geography of the Canadian North*, pp. 19-37. The carrying capacity of the Tundra for caribou is estimated at ca. 0.4 to 1.2 caribou per km² (see, Doug Heard & Paul Gray, "Habitat," p. 77).
- 5 Richard Slobodin, "Kutchin," p. 515. Caribou were less significant for the Draanjik, or Black River, Gwich'in (Richard Nelson, *Hunters of the Northern Forest*, pp. 112-114). However, the traditional life of the Draanjik was characterized by a degree of mobility similar to that of other Gwich'in groups (p. 17).
- 6 The following description is taken from, Doug Urquhart, "Porcupine Herd," pp. 151-154.
- 7 See, for example, John Fredson, *John Fredson Edward Sapir haa googwandak*, pp. 51-55.
- 8 Richard Nelson, *Hunters of the Northern Forest*, pp. 84-112.
- 9 John Fredson, *John Fredson Edward Sapir haa googwandak*, p. 55.
- 10 Richard Nelson, *Hunters of the Northern Forest*; Cornelius Osgood, *Ethnography of the Kutchin*; Frederick Hadleigh-West, *The Netsi Kutchin*; Ann W. Acheson, *Nomads in Town*.
- 11 To hunt, and thus to travel, were constant necessities, the existence of highly sophisticated traditional storage methods notwithstanding. For a theoretical treatment of this problematic, see, Tim Ingold, "Significance of Storage in Hunting Societies."
- 12 Paul Heard & Doug Gray, "Habitat," p. 77.
- 13 Émile Petitot, *Dictionnaire de la langue Dènè-Dindjié*, p. 233.
- 14 First used by Murray who spelled it 'Koochin' (*Journal of the Yukon*, p. 84).
- 15 Richard Slobodin, "Kutchin," p. 514.
- 16 Sheppard Krech, "Disease, Starvation and Northern Athapaskan Social Organization," p. 718.
- 17 Department of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report for 1896*.
- 18 GSA, MG 56/2/C23, Canham Papers, Thomas Canham, Undated Account of the Indians and Their Life in the North.
- 19 Sheppard Krech, "Aboriginal Population of the Kutchin," pp. 56-59.
- 20 The following overview is largely based on Cornelius Osgood, "Kutchin Tribal Distribution and Synonymy;" Frederick Hadleigh-West, "On the Distribution and Territories of the Western Kutchin Tribes."
- 21 Robert McKennan, "Anent the Kutchin Tribes," p. 369.
- 22 See, Ingrid Kritsch & Alestine Andre, *Traditional Use of the Travaillant Lake Area*; idem, *Study of the Gwichya Gwich'in Place Names*.
- 23 'Ratting' refers to the muskrat hunt. The main ratting season extends from April into late May.
- 24 Dan Cadzow, "Habitat of Loucheux Bands," p. 177.
- 25 Cornelius Osgood, "Kutchin Tribal Distribution," p. 171.
- 26 Cornelius Osgood, "Kutchin Tribal Distribution," p. 171; see also, Frederick Hadleigh-West, "Western Kutchin Tribes," p. 115.
- 27 This latter point appears to be of considerable relevance in view of the theoretical arguments advanced above, and in view of the fact that the structure of Gwich'in, or for that matter, Athapaskan societies in general, is predominantly analyzed in terms of their adaptation to the environment. The introductory remarks to the standard reference work on the Athapaskan cultures state: "Subarctic ethnologists generally recognize that the existence—physical, societal, and cultural—of the hunting peoples of the subarctic has been *sharply and immediately keyed* to the terrain and its subsistence resources" (June Helm (ed.), *Subarctic*, p. 1, my emphasis). The fairly homogeneous nature of the subarctic environment yields highly sophisticated analyses of homologically adapted and adaptive systems. Yet at the level of cultural practice and social production, these analyses often remain vague on locally perceived significant distinctions such as those explained to me by Rev. Salmon, which order daily practice as it is produced by

Dene to the same degree as do the environmental constraints which local social and cultural production adaptively mediates. At issue is whether these processes are to be analyzed as cultural adaptations to an extreme environment or as locally distinct modes of the appropriation of nature—for which the difficult subarctic environment indubitably poses distinct constraints (see, Tim Ingold, *The Appropriation of Nature*; Roy Ellen, *Environment, Subsistence and System*). In *Culture and Practical Reason*, Sahlins posits as the main problem of cultural ecology precisely that it can in analytically sophisticated ways specify the system of constraints posed by a given ecological environment, and thereby delineate the functionally necessary adaptive structures of the socio-cultural system in question, without being able to work the analysis through to the level of 'cultural specifics.' In his study of Algerian peasant societies, Bourdieu similarly rejects ecological finalism. He argues that while environmental constraints did indeed circumscribe the 'range of the possible' in these cultures, human agency constructed specific structures appropriate to the particular situation, generating in the process a partially autonomous societal organization (*The Algerians*; see also, Derek Robbins, *The Work of Pierre Bourdieu*, pp. 16-23).

An important alternative to ecological studies in Athapaskan anthropology will be found in Asch's writings, which not only emphasize the analysis of modes of production rather than of forms of adaptation, but which furthermore analyze the economics of historical change in Dene society. The models of social production and technocratic rationality implied by cultural ecology are not well suited for this latter analysis (Michael Asch, "Steps Toward the Analysis of Athapaskan Social Organization," pp. 46-47; see also his, "Ecological-Evolutionary Model"). The term 'dual economy' employed by Asch also falls under this paradigm ("Some Effects of the Late 19th Century Modernization of the Fur Trade"); see further his, "The Dene Economy."

- 28 See June Helm et al., "Contact History of the Subarctic Athapaskans," pp. 310-311.
- 29 The year 1898 marks the arrival of the first group of Klondikers in the Fort McPherson area.
- 30 Susan Ugarenko, *Distribution of the Kutchin and Their Spatial Pattern of Trade*. See also, Simone Decosse, *Athapaskan-Tlingit Trade Relations*.
- 31 Roddy Peters, "The Martin Skin Coverall Man," *Peel River Press*, 15 September 1970.
- 32 During the dark days, hunting occurred only when absolutely necessary; the caribou killed in the surrounds of the fall hunt had to tide the group over this period (CGLP, L29/4, Jim Edwards, *Christmas Long Ago*, p. 1).
- 33 Richard Slobodin, *Band Organization*, p. 21. Augustus Peers complained in the post journal that "... it would be folly to expect a Loucheux to visit the Fort in the dark days ..." (PAC, MG19/D12, Augustus Peer, *Peel's River Journal*, 25 December 1850). In 1848, for example, the Gwich'in arrived at the Fort in 19 canoes on 2 June, and left again on 20 June (2 June 1848, 20 June 1848). Note that mooseskin boats had not yet come into use, at that time.
- 34 CGLP, L4/10, Lucy Vaneltsi, *Traditional Life*, #2, p. 4. A famine which began in the winter of 1928 forced Gwich'in teenagers attending the Anglican residential mission school in Hay River to hunt small game with bow and arrow, as late as March 1929. The entry in the Journal of Events for 22 March states: "Big drop in temperature to 36 below ... boys resurrecting bows & arrows" (PAA, 70.387/MR4.3-9.6, Journal of Events, St. Peter's, January 1923 - December 1929). This may well have been the last time that bow and arrow were used for subsistence hunting.
- 35 See, Paul Bonnetplume, *Hunting and Fishing in the Fall* (CGLP, L21/3-4); Ron D. McFee, "Caribou Fences of the Historic Yukon Kutchin."
- 36 YTA, MS82/261, William K. Irving, [Caribou Fences], p.1. The Klondiker George Mitchell, who passed the winter of 1898 at 'Wind City' claims that the Gwich'in used bow and arrow for the caribou hunt as late as March 1899 (Angus Graham, *The Golden Grindstone*, p. 211).
- 37 RLA, MS48/box 1/folder 2, Albert Tritt, *Story of the Early Natives*.
- 38 See, Sheppard Krech, "Changing Trapping Patterns," p. 47.
- 39 For example, HSFC, Andrew Kunnizzi, *Loucheux Games*.
- 40 Richard Slobodin, *Band Organization*, p. 27.
- 41 "There was great excitement here [Fort McPherson] last Monday. A large skin boat (16 moose) arrived, bringing six families from the mountains" (PAA, 70.387/MR200/28, Crisall to Lucas, 11 July 1921).
- 42 Slobodin, *Band Organization*, p. 37.
- 43 PAC, MG9/G3/2, Journal of St. Matthew's Mission, 1 June 1923; 4 June 1923.
- 44 Richard Slobodin, *Band Organization*, p. 17.
- 45 Angus Graham, *The Golden Grindstone*, p. 214.
- 46 Robert McKennan, *Chandalar Kutchin*, p. 66.
- 47 Cornelius Osgood, *Ethnography of the Kutchin*, p. 111.

- 48 Cornelius Osgood, *Ethnography of the Kutchin*, p. 114.
- 49 Richard McKennan, *Chandalar Kutchin*, p. 43.
- 50 Cornelius Osgood, *Ethnography of the Kutchin*, p. 110.
- 51 Cornelius Osgood, *Ethnography of the Kutchin*, p. 111.
- 52 Cornelius Osgood, *Ethnography of the Kutchin*, p. 112.
- 53 Cornelius Osgood, *Ethnography of the Kutchin*, p. 115.
- 54 Strachan Jones, "Kutchin Tribe," p. 325. The term for chief, *dinjii khekwai*, also carries the connotation of 'wealthy man.' Likewise, a particularly skillful and successful hunter acquired the special designation, *dinjii vig-wil'in*.
- 55 Robert McKennan, *Chandalar Kutchin*, p. 54; see also, Cornelius Osgood, *Ethnography of the Kutchin*, p. 100; Richard Slobodin, *Band Organization*, p. 44.
- 56 Cornelius Osgood, *Ethnography of the Kutchin*, p. 117. The terminology is bifurcate-collateral, of the Hawaiian type; there is no differentiation between parallel and cross-cousins. The term grandfather (*vitsii*, 'his grandfather') is often used to indicate acknowledgment of generational, and thus cultural, authority (CGLP, L52/1, Jim Koe, *A Long Time Ago*, #1, p. 6).
- 57 This has important implications for the process of cultural reproduction and habitus formation, in particular in the field of formal education. The Dene have succeeded only recently in integrating this form of authority into the formal school curriculum in any sustained manner, through the *Dene Kede* curriculum document (NWTG, Education, Culture & Employment, 1993), which has been compiled in extensive collaboration with elders in the communities. In relocating the position of authority implied by this aspect of cultural inculcation into the class room, however, the old ways would appear to have been subsumed under the *modus operandi* of the formalized work of schooling in the form of an *opus operatum*. The detailed reflections of *Dene Kede* (the document is just over 200 pages long), accompanied by a *Teacher Resource Manual*, would appear to indicate as much.
- 58 Cornelius Osgood, *Ethnography of the Kutchin*, pp. 40-42. After the beginning of the fur trade beads were used for the same purpose, and by 1854 had in fact become one of the most important items of trade (PAC, MG19/A29, J. Anderson, Papers, Anderson to Simpson, 31 March 1854).
- 59 Richard Slobodin, *Band Organization*, pp. 62-64.
- 60 Richard Slobodin, "Kutchin Anxiety," passim.
- 61 See, for example, CGLP, L27/-, Sarah Peters, *Vigwahrtrel*; CGLP, L22/4, Eliza Andre, *A Long Time Ago: Bushman Story*; CGLP, L/49/1, Roddy Peters, *Bushman Stories*.
- 62 YTA, 85/97/F192, Robert McDonald, Journals, 28 June 1863. Vigwahtr'al died in July 1867, still living in isolation (ibid., 20 July 1867).
- 63 Roddy Peters, *Bushman Stories*, p. 1.
- 64 Richard Slobodin, *Band Organization*, p. 45.
- 65 Richard Slobodin, *Band Organization*, p. 45; a story told by William Nerysoo lays out these qualities in a didactic manner (CGLP, 11/3-4, *The Generous Chief*).
- 66 Roland Scollon, *Context of the Informant Narrative Performance*, p. 38ff.
- 67 Roland Scollon, *Context of the Informant Narrative Performance*, pp. 38-45.
- 68 Michael Mason, *The Arctic Forests*, p. 66.
- 69 Angus Graham, *The Golden Grindstone*, p. 234.
- 70 Trader Alexander H. Murray of Fort Yukon shared this opinion: "One of the indians, here lately, passed on his way to the lower band [Gwichaa], those he was with having taken his wife. Women are very scarce amongst the indians here & most of their quarrels originate from taking each others wives" (HBCA, B240/a/1, Ft. Yukon Post Journal, 29 October 1847).
- 71 CGLP, L21/8, Paul Bonnetplume, *War Between Indians and Eskimos*; see also, Richard Slobodin, "Eastern Kutchin Warfare," p. 78ff.
- 72 Sheppard Krech, "Interethnic Relations in the Lower Mackenzie River Region," p. 108.
- 73 RCA, LDM, 27, Séguin to Clut, 3 August 1867.
- 74 GLCC, Elizabeth Cass, Some Observations on the Loucheux People, p. 1/10. "Indians came from Nutteilni [*Nitain-laii*], men only. They have received secret information that the Esqx led by Kulik meditate attacking them with fire-

arms," McDonald laconically noted in the mission journal (YTA, MS 85/97, Robert McDonald, Journals, 11 July 1901). The rumor resurfaced in the course of the subsequent summer (ibid., 17 June 1902).

- 75 Even by 1874, Gwichyah Gwich'in still felt compelled to post guards against surprise attacks by Inuit groups (RCA, LDM, 27a, Séguin to Clut, 30 July 1874); "... les Esquimaux sont leur cauchemar du jour et de la nuit," Séguin concluded (ibid.).
- 76 Richard Slobodin, "Eastern Kutchin Warfare," p. 89.
- 77 The construction of a new trading post inevitably led to the loss of positional advantages for groups operating as middlemen between the post and more distant groups. The Gwich'in associated with LaPierre House trade reacted with unconcealed scepticism to Murray's plan of establishing a post further west. On the eve of his departure for the Yukon Murray noted that "our going there is making a mighty fuss amongst the indians all sorts of rumours are flying about—some for, and others, against—one tribe is anxious for us to go, and another threaten to cut us off to burn our Fort &c" (YTA, MS 87/34, Donald Ross Collection, Murray to Ross, 2 June 1847). See also, Catherine McClellan, "Feuding and Warfare," p. 216.
- 78 Richard Slobodin, "Eastern Kutchin Warfare," p. 86.

CHAPTER 4

GWICH'IN TSII'IN: CONTACT-TRADITIONAL GAMES

It was all fun and no pay.

— Lazarus Sittichinli

In order to specify the position of the field of games within the overall social space of contact-traditional Gwich'in society, it is necessary to determine the articulations which obtained between that field and the other fields constituting the social space. It follows from the description provided in the preceding chapter that the most immediate of these determinations must necessarily concern the connection between games and the field of subsistence production, or, in other words, the functional adaptive position of games with respect to the high degree of mobility of the contact-traditional life-style. Bay trader Hardisty noted the Gwich'in to be "... passionately fond of dancing, wrestling, running &c;"¹ according to McKennan, the men emphasized running and jumping in their games, as a means of preparation for the hunt.² Scott compiled an inventory of northern Athapaskans games, listing 104 games in all. In the great majority of these, the outcome was determined by motor or physical skills which were also of immediate relevancy in many tasks of subsistence production. The 69 games Glassford recorded for traditional Inuit society, located in an environment probably even more difficult to master, were clustered likewise, and a similar argument has been made by Gravelle and collaborators with reference to Slavey and Dogrib traditional games.³ The inventory of Gwich'in traditional games provided in Figure 6 also indicates a predominance of games whose outcome was dependent on the display of physical skills functionally homologous to those of certain aspects of subsistence production. The subsequent analysis will attempt to demonstrate that, by virtue of this homology, the dominant modes of valorization of physical competency in the field of games were partly determined by forms of valorization extant in the field of subsistence production.⁴ Before this is done, however, and in order to clarify the subsequent discussion, a cursory overview of the inventory of Gwich'in traditional games will be provided. The reader is referred to Appendix I (beginning on page 231) for a detailed description of the various games.

1. Inventory of Traditional Games

From a purely descriptive point of view, Gwich'in traditional games can be categorized according to outcome determinants. The tabulation provided in Figure 6 indicates that most of the games can in fact be subsumed under Roberts' and Sutton-Smith' category of 'games of physical skill.' The sub-categories indicate further that in many of these games physical skills were actualized which were identical with or analogous to those required in the various aspects of subsistence production. The predominance of games testing the participant's strength, endurance, or, in target games, accuracy, indicates as much; in a functionalist sense, many Gwich'in traditional games had ecologically adaptive functions. Further, as will be discussed in a subsequent section, children's games were likewise structured by such elements, rendering the games important means in the process of enculturation.

strength/ distance	endurance/ speed	accuracy	agility	team games	children's games
high jump	running races	bow & arrow	bouncing game	Gwich'in football	blow gun
broad jump	snowshoe races	moosesein chase	pole race	shinay	bull roarer
back pack race	back pack race	hoop & pole	Gwich'in swing	moosesein ball	caribou eyes
beaver shin bone		ring & pin			rope skipping
snow snake		snow snake			sling
stick pull		spear throw			string figures
pole push		willow globe			caribou game
tug of war		stick throw			lead game
wrestling			wrestling		

Figure 6 Gwich'in Traditional Games

The categories are heuristically arranged into skill groups according to outcome determinant. They do not represent the capital structure (physical and otherwise) of a specific instantiation of a given game.

Strength and Distance: Many of the games in this group involve pushing or pulling an opponent out of position. Notable is the stick pull, *nalàizrak*, which, because of its pervasiveness, could almost be called a 'national' game of the Gwich'in. Two players grasped the end of a short stick which had been greased with caribou grease, and attempted to pull it out of each other's hand. The tug-of-war, *tlyá hah trahandak*, and its opposite, the pole push, *niline' traha' kak*, were variations on the same principle. Snow snake, *zhoh kak chíijak*, was a winter variation on the spear throw.⁵ A spear (i.e., the 'snake') was hurled across a flat snowy surface; the Gwich'in, unlike other groups, did not prepare a 'glide trough' through which to guide the spear. The player whose spear glided

the furthest won the competition. In beaver shin bone, the participant attempted to break the shin bone of a beaver by main force; a successful attempt was viewed as proof of extraordinary physical strength. The backpack race was a combination of running and weightlifting. Participants carrying heavy packs attempted to outrace each other in reaching a finish line. This game indexed not only the skills of the hunt, but, more specifically, the successful outcome of the hunt. Hunters carrying back to camp the proceeds of a successful hunt underwent similar exertions.⁶

Endurance and Speed: Running races constituted a close link between the field of games and the field of subsistence production. Just how these races were organized during the early contact-traditional period has not been documented in any detail, but there is mention of a running race held at Fort McPherson in January 1849; the distance covered would have been about 1.5 km.⁷ Foot races were held in the summer, while snowshoe races were the obvious alternative during the dark days of the season. The contest referred to above diverged from the norm in that, although it was staged in winter time, the runners were not allowed to wear snowshoes.

Accuracy: These games constitute the second large group of games functionally linked to the field of subsistence production. In fact, the implements used in many of these games are identical with those used in subsistence production. The bow and arrow shoot, *k'i'yahahdak*, the spear throw, and the stick throw, *khah yit'adahthak*, all followed the same principle. The participants shot at a target, the player with the best shot or throw winning the competition. A variant of the snow snake was also played as a target game.

Agility: The outcome determinants of games grouped under this heading cannot be linked directly to the physical skills required in subsistence production. The 'pole race' probably came closest in this regard. A number of poles were driven into the bed of a river or creek such that they protruded about twenty centimeters above the surface, spaced one meter apart. The participants jumped from pole to pole, attempting to cross the river without falling into the water. The Gwich'in blanket toss or 'bouncing game, *akàii*, was reminiscent of the modern trampoline, but it was more difficult to execute, because the blanket or mat on which the player jumped ('bounced') was much smaller than a trampoline, measuring only 30x30 cm. Wrestling, *nih'tir'oovàdàdì*, was used as a form of greeting between men when groups met on the trail. The custom of shaking hands, serving the same symbolic purpose, was introduced by the missionaries; it was not traditionally known to the Gwich'in.

Team Games: Gwich'in football, *nehkak cho*, was fairly similar to association football, although in general the game was probably less structured and more 'unruly.' It was predominantly played by boys and young men. This was also true of shinny, *k'adzihtshi* (a variant of hockey played without skates). Mooseskin ball, *nehkak nichii na'trodandak*, on the other hand, was played by everybody, men, women, and children. A team of women played against a team of men for possession of a ball the size of a baseball. The men could only volley or bat the ball, while the women

were free to throw it or grab it and run with it. This was a favorite game to while away the long nights of mid-summer.

Children's Games: Games played by children were by and large the same as those played by adults, with the exception of those variants of snowsnake and the axe throw which were considered to be too dangerous. In addition, a number of role and guessing games existed which were said to be of importance in the process of enculturation, i.e., habitus formation.

Conspicuous by its absence from this list is *udzi*, the hand game, which could almost be called the 'national' game of some other groups of the Dene. *Udzi* was a dramatic and highly elaborate guessing game, played by men only. Teams consisting of four or more players knelt opposite each other. The leader ('captain') of one team attempted to guess the position of a small object each player of the opposing team hid in either hand.⁸ Each team brought along a number of drummers who drummed and sang while it was their team's turn to hide the tokens. For each incorrect guess, the captain threw a counting stick across to the opposition. The team to collect all the counting sticks won the round. Old-timers do not consider *udzi* to be a Gwich'in traditional game, but Gwichyah and Teet'it Gwich'in learned it from the 'upriver people' when the expansion of the fur trade led to frequent regularized contacts with Sahtu and Mountain people trading into Fort Good Hope.

2. On the Trail

In response to my inquiries concerning the traditional games, old-timers at Fort McPherson would sometimes indicate that they didn't think there was much to discuss, really. Life in the old days had been hard; people had been too busy eking out an existence to have much time for playing games. A perusal of the COPE Gwich'in stories and earlier sources, by contrast, yields a fair number of descriptions outlining how the old-time games were played in the camps and on the trail. Krech, for one, argues that the "severity and harshness of the aboriginal environment remains to be demonstrated."⁹ Hardisty pronounced the Gwichaa Gwich'in to be "passionately fond of dancing, wrestling, running, &c,"¹⁰ a passion, we shall see, which cost Hardisty's colleague Murray a sleepless night or two. Scarcity and famine were an ever-present danger, but traditional games were interconnected with the vagaries of subsistence production on the positive as well as on the negative side; needless to say, games were more likely to be played when times were good, but certain games were specifically mobilized when times were bad. Likewise, patterns of game participation were influenced by what I have termed 'mobility' in a preceding chapter, that is to say, by properties of the field of subsistence production.

2.1. Mobility

Mobility as a 'structuring structure' of Gwich'in culture was articulated in the field of games by the fact that the games required little or no equipment. The traditional mode of travel relied on the strength of the members of the group, in particular the women's. What people were unable to carry,

would not be taken along. Most of the equipment required to start a game could be produced on the spot, therefore very little had to be carried along. Not surprisingly for inhabitants of the subarctic forest, much of it was made from wood, which could be obtained easily enough everywhere. More importantly, the required equipment was also readily available, because it was used in activities other than games. The most highly specialized pieces of equipment used in games, babiche (ropes made from moose hide), bows, arrows, and spears, were also used in pursuits such as hunting, and for snares. Thus, few items had to be constructed especially for games. Only shinny sticks and pucks, the balls used in Dene football and mooseskin ball, and the equipment of the ring-and-pin game were manufactured for use in games exclusively. In its most immediate sense, the relationship was constituted by a simple extension of use of the implements of subsistence production into the field of games; contests such as the spear throw, the bow and arrow shoot, and the caribou chase indicate as much. Contests of strength involving all members of the group, such as in the tug-of-war, and also the pole push and the stick pull displayed a similar orientation.

In a more general sense, the importance of mobility, and of travelling on the land, in contact-traditional culture can perhaps be made more palpable by considering two occurrences of Gwich'in normalized daily practice which from a retrospective, more sedentary position appear as extraordinary feats of physical endurance. "An old Indian woman paid me a visit all the way from Fond du Lac,"¹¹ Bay trader Peers laconically noted in the Fort McPherson post journal in December 1850. 'Fond du Lac,' also known as 'Bubbling Up,' was one of the major wintering areas during the contact-traditional period. To travel from there to Fort McPherson, this woman would have covered a distance of over 300km. A similar observation is found in missionary Robert McDonald's journal who noted that "Mary Trichtisuttrhekk came; she walked a distance of about twelve miles from Nelson's fishery, and was quite tired. She is the oldest woman here among the Indians, and is about eighty years of age."¹² Even disregarding the fact that at the end of October temperatures in the western sub-Arctic can drop to as low as -20° Celsius, this would be a remarkable feat for any octogenarian.

This capacity for physical endurance has left its impression on many observers who became acquainted with the contact-traditional Gwich'in way of life. Andrew Jackson Stone, who travelled through Gwich'in country before the turn of the century, considered the Gwich'in to be "... one of the hardiest races of people in the north. They are quick, athletic, and among the best snowshoers and trippers of the north."¹³ Anglican missionary Isaac Stringer considered the Gwich'in to be "tough travellers." During a trip in the winter of 1892, the greater part of the distance between Rampart House and LaPierre House was covered running; at the end of the trip, Stringer himself felt in "splendid trim."¹⁴ His colleague Thomas Canham characterized the Gwich'in as being "continually on the move."¹⁵ George Mitchell often reproduced towards the hyperbole of the 'rugged frontiersman' when describing his journeys with the Gwich'in, but he was intimately familiar with

Well, father, to tell you the truth, I should not boast, but I consider I know more about northern Arctic Canada than any living white man & of the mode of travel for I have travelled from end to end of Canada in the Arctic Regions & I studied the habits of all the different tribes of natives, not only in theory but in practise & experience. Altho I do say it, my trip to Fort Yukon this winter & back to Hershell [sic] Island & up to Peel River alone is one that no one is likely to repeat & believe it is thought a great deal of here, but mind you I think nothing of it myself. I call it a pleasure trip for I consider I understand how to travel under great cold & privation with the least trouble ...

— Hubert Darrell, letter to his father, Fort McPherson, 1 June 1906

Vignette 1 Performative Disposition I

'Thought a great deal of here'

their mode of travel. Mitchell himself would often enough be tired out at the end of the day—for Chief Francis' group, it was all in a day's work:

It really was literally a run, as the Indians were out to make a quick journey and ran all the time, one team vying with another—they dress in very light furs for these trips, and wear special dog-running snowshoes that are long and narrow and slide over the snow like skis. I was in good hard condition and didn't at all want to be beat by Indians, but by the afternoon I tell you I was feeling the strain. I just felt as if my lungs would *burst*. As you know, Graham, your breathing isn't improved by forty-five below, and we were at a high elevation which made it that much worse.¹⁶

Some fifty years later, the ophthalmologist Elizabeth Cass, who worked in the Mackenzie Delta in the 1950s, observed that "in the old days the young men were famed for their running and athletic capabilities"; even during her time, Gwich'in would still "run down the moose and caribou on snowshoes, at which they are expert."¹⁷ She went on to note that

they still are excellent on snowshoes, breaking trail on snow on the land which may be three to four feet deep. ... They can accomplish ten miles a day whilst doing this, whereas on good trails thirty-five miles in a day is nothing out of the way. ... I know that on a run which lasted twenty-three hours, with two ten-minute breaks and half an hour for a meal, one young Loucheux seemed to run most of the way, and at the end of this arduous journey was running in front to make them go."¹⁸

Accounts such as Stone's and Mitchell's are constructed from the position of the outsider concerned with mastery of practical skills as they are dictated by the harsh northern environment. Their emphasis on the demanding character of this environment produces an implicit valorization of the self-referential, and by extension competitive, aspects of the physical adjuncts of practical mastery required of the individual in order to survive in that environment ('self-reliance'); the excerpt from a letter by Hubert Darrell—a contemporary of Mitchell's and Stone's—reproduced in Vignette 1 is a characteristic example of the manner in which this *topos* is frequently framed. And Mitchell, it will be noted in the passage quoted above, did not want to be 'beat by Indians.'

Statements made by Gwich'in old-timers place a similar emphasis on such physical accomplishments, but, by contrast, they exhibit a distinctly different form of valorization. Firstly, concerning the physical endurance implied by the arduousness of travelling on the trail which so impressed Mitchell and Stone, a distinct shift of focus of emphasis can be noted. Self-referential evaluations or overt comparisons, such as are provided by Mitchell, are rare; rather, a concern with modes of travelling on the land as an orientation towards what for Mitchell appeared to be a 'hostile' environment emerges. That Gwich'in themselves de-emphasized the comparative, self-referential aspects of their arduous travels is implied by an observation made by Stone:

The endurance of some of these trippers, or voyageurs, is something wonderful. I have known them to run after a sled a distance of forty miles in a day, during which time they were in and out of deep snow, over rough going, through brush, on every side of the sled, back and forth, helping, straightening the dogs when they got tangled, and exerting themselves every moment; and then pitch camp, laughing and talking in a jolly good humor, as though it was fun, *never allowing any indication of being tired*.¹⁹

This disposition to play down the effects of physical exertion indicates that in the cultural logic of 'travelling on the land,' such feats can be understood as aspects of normalized daily practice not considered worthy of special consideration. When Gwich'in old-timers deal with the same topic—as they are disposed to doing often—a different form of engagement becomes evident. The statements compiled in Vignette 2 provide an indication of this performative disposition, of this shift of focus away from Stone's and Mitchell's concern with the physical performative aspects of a demanding mode of travel, to the expression of an orientation towards the land which was effected through moving, that is to say, 'travelling,' on and through it. These statements often refer to journeys made in the very same part of Gwich'in country traversed by Stone and Mitchell (the Wind and Blackstone Rivers area, the Hungry Lake area, and the Richardson Mountains). Travelling in such rugged terrain held the potential for a strong emphasis on the physical, performative aspects of practical competency, but the cultural valuations expressed in the old-timers' accounts circumscribe 'travelling' as it orients people towards the land, they do not make physical accomplishments as such the topos for self-referential reflections on the performative aspects emphasizing individual and comparative performance and achievement. The generative efficacy of the generalized habitus, of 'bush consciousness,' was expressed here by the fact that the valorizations were refocused in such a way as to minimize the potential for overt self-referential and comparative evaluation within the context of this endeavor, in the first place. This is not to suggest that 'bush consciousness' was operative as a constantly reproduced, conscious and intentional avoidance of interpersonal comparison; rather, it operated in the mode of a disposition to frame the discourse such that the potential for that kind of comparison did not constitute one of its signifying elements.²⁰

When a person loves his country, he always has to return to his country to make a living. ... When a person loves his country he has to keep moving and make a living. — Mrs. Sarah Peters

The people ... had to go a long ways and had to do travelling ... in the spring, it was nice and clean ground through the mountains. The country looked so beautiful—they enjoyed the country and clean ground they camped on. — Roddy Peters

People never stayed one place as they were forever moving, even in the summer. In the summer they moved around with dog packs and this is the way the people used to live. — Ronnie Pascal

People never stayed in one place too long ... In those days, it was really hard. The people were forever moving. — Mrs. Christie Thompson

The land is so beautiful to live on, no one ever got sick, we lived so good. — Mrs. Annie B. Robert

Sometimes we didn't all travel together, we just travelled as we pleased. — Andrew Kunnizzi

... we were lucky, we got plenty of meat, but we never settled down, we were forever moving from one camp to another. — Ronnie Pascal

They kept moving [to] wherever they killed caribou. They stayed there maybe two weeks or one week, and then they kept moving. They did that all winter. — Roddy Peters

In those days the people never stayed in one place for any length of time. — Mrs. Christie Thompson

People never stayed in one place for very long, they were forever moving. — Mrs. Lucy Vaneltsi

We travelled anywhere and everywhere. It was such a beautiful life. — Mrs. Annie B. Robert

People used to move quite a bit in the mountains, they hardly stayed one place. They were forever moving. — Mrs. Laura Thompson

Them days, people stayed only in tents and most of the times they stayed only in the mountains and they never stayed in one place, always moving around in search of food. — Mrs. Mary Vittekwa

We moved a lot when we stayed in the mountains. We did this all winter. — Andrew Kunnizzi

Vignette 2 Performative Disposition II

'It was nice and clean ground through the mountains'

The argument can be extended further by considering more specifically the valorization of physical competency occurring in contact-traditional subsistence hunting. The hunt had a clearly definable outcome, which, furthermore, was often partially dependent upon physical endurance and competency. It was thus more amenable to a comparative and inter-personal evaluation of individual performance. A concern with the display of individual physical prowess in this particular area did indeed exist and was articulated, in the field of games, by a strong preference for running races, *nihkhagal tr'ihajah*. The cultural significance of this form of physical capital is captured in William Nerysoo's remark: "But I like to see the foot race with a bunch of strong boys. I like to see the foot race more than anything else ... some smart boys, strong boys, five, six boys—foot race! ... sometime one man go ahead, second one come behind, third one come behind. They got hard time to get back because they breathe hard in the sunshine, and [it is] hot. *That game I like!*"²¹ Likewise, Lazarus Sittichinli explained that while nobody took too much notice of the winner of wrestling competitions (this is a topic to which I will return), "the only thing is, everyone knows who the strongest, the toughest or the best runner is."²² Yet the dominant form of valorization of this form of physical capital shifted, by virtue of the overall cooperative context of the hunt, towards an

evaluation of physical performance as it contributed to the common good, and not of superior and inferior individual physical performance as such. Symbolic capital was not to be gained by the competitive, comparative evaluation of physical prowess, but by the cooperative implications of such prowess, in the context of the hunt. Accounts dealing with physical endurance and speed as aspects of hunting do not *overtly* express either comparative or self-referential aspects of practical mastery even where the implicit connection was most immediate²³—where the successful outcome of the hunt was directly contingent on physical endurance and speed. Such was the case in winter time when the hunter, using his large hunting snowshoes, attempted to approach a moose to within the range of his spear or bow. The moose broke through the deep snow, while the hunter glided along on top, using his snowshoes not unlike cross-country skis. Such a chase could last several hours. Long-distance endurance and speed were the prerequisites for a successful hunt under such circumstances; a man possessing those skills was known for his athletic skills, but valued as a good hunter. Symbolic capital could thus be acquired by virtue of these physical skills, but the valorization occurred in the context of a largely communal and cooperative endeavor; the following remark indicates that this connection was made habitually: "Charlie Rat was the best runner around here. He chased moose often and did not have to run too far."²⁴ Neither was Andrew Kunnizzi himself a mean runner; he once succeeded in even running down a fox "who still had half a rabbit in his mouth."²⁵ Here again, the significance of physical competency is valorized in the context of the hunt.

The absence of overt evaluation of comparative physical performance is also evident in Andrew Kunnizzi's account of a hunting trip he undertook with his partner in 1925: "We started off hunting for moose together. We did not go very far; we spotted a moose and I shot it down. At the same time there were fresh caribou tracks there. I went after those, too, and I came across five caribou. I killed them, too. *By this time, my friend, Joseph, caught up to me* and we skinned and cut the caribou."²⁶ On another trip, by contrast, he himself was outrun by his hunting partner; the same *implicit* evaluation of physical skills, occurs: "... each man went their own way hunting. Peter Alexie was there, too. I went with him. We came across moose tracks. The moose had started running so Peter Alexie started after it, running. *In no time he left me behind* and once again I was alone."²⁷

That the quoted observations contain no *overt* comparison can be viewed as a function of the efficacy of 'bush consciousness,' characterized, it will be recalled, by a disposition to avoid such comparison in any field of practice and physical activity. Mitchell noted of hunting trips, of which he undertook several with chief Francis' group,²⁸ that when the men assembled in one of the tents in the evening to discuss the happenings of the day, they "... were much more interested in giving an exact record of the facts, and never made any special mention of their own performances."²⁹ Similarly, recounting a historical story of a particularly dangerous bear hunt, "... they were always ready enough to describe other people's feats however little they boasted about their own. I always

admired them for that."³⁰ Among the Nets'ait, furthermore, a proscription existed according to which "a hunter must not count the dead animals after a big kill lest he offends their spirits."³¹ Returning to Lazarus Sittichinli's observation related above, it now becomes clear that in this instance the distributional properties of the field of games (in particular the fundamental distinction between cooperative and competitive practice in games of physical skills) itself were affected by that field's articulation with the field of subsistence hunting, and in particular those aspects of the habitus operative within the cooperative context of that field. Sporting achievement in wrestling was not worthy of too much notice, but prowess in physical endurance and running were noted because they were valorized in the field of subsistence production, a largely communal and cooperative, and not competitive endeavor. Symbolic capital accrued through a recognition of superior (and thus inferior) physical performance, but it was valorized as a cooperative contribution.

2.2. Feast and Famine

As was pointed out in Chapter 3, the Gwich'in seasonal cycle was characterized by movement during the greater part of the year, while a relatively sedentary life-style was maintained during summer and, after the fall caribou hunt, during early winter. One of the major meeting points during spring before break-up was downriver from 'Bubbling Up' where the various groups who had been travelling separately during the winter met to travel towards 'Fish Trap Head,' one of the preferred areas to pass the long days of summer (see page 41).

"During this season, games and ceremonials flourished, directed by ceremonial leaders."³² — Of ceremonials, the potlatch needs to be mentioned, although it was of greater significance among the western Gwich'in where the influence of the coastal cultures was more pervasive. According to Bay trader Hardisty who worked at Fort Yukon in the 1840s, the Gwich'in had adopted the potlatch only shortly prior to his arrival in the area.³³ Strachan Jones noted that a number of games were played in connection with the mortuary potlatch:

... when a man of consequence dies, his friends make a dance ... in his honor. A space some twenty yards square is railed in, a fire lighted in the middle, and various games are played, such as putting a pole across the fire, one party trying to push the other to the end of the enclosure, or one takes a dressed deer skin and runs off with it; the fellow, if he is nearly caught, drops the skin, when another takes it and is chased by all the rest in his turn. At last the deer-skin is seized by as many as can find room to take hold; it is then cut up, each retaining the piece in his hand. Sometimes bladders of grease are used instead of deer-skin. Now and then they gather in the enclosure, and, standing round the fence, sing mournful songs and make speeches. This continues for ten or twelve days...³⁴

Hardisty claims that teams participating in the pole push consisted of fifty to sixty players per side.³⁵ It might be noted in passing that the front man on the winning team had the dubious honor

of being thoroughly warmed by the fire—an unusual motivation to attempt and win the bout. Neither did the running race provide for a strictly competitive outcome; just who would succeed in obtaining a piece of the skin or pemmican was decided through a general scramble, and not so much by the participants' speed. Dances, running races, wrestling and the stick pull complemented the potlatch proceedings.³⁶ There is mention of one occasion when a running race was used to determine who was to prepare the grave for the deceased:

"Nandeh's young wife died at the Camp. A very novel mode of electing 'grave makers' arose on this occasion. No one would consent voluntarily to perform the last office for the dead, so they determined to decide it by a Race, the one who arrived last at the goal to take the job in hand. At a signal they all set off without snow shoes across the river. The Husband arrived first & the rest all in a lump, so the race ended in a dead heat. They could not come to a decision. Boucher & Sanspareille were permitted to make a cache & inter the body."³⁷

"The Indians would always play games wherever they moved to."³⁸ — Festivals and potlatches aside, games were often played when the hunt had been successful. The gender division of labor was such that the men travelled ahead of the women and children, only lightly burdened and ready for the hunt, as the opportunity demanded. They would leave some mark or token at the place where the day's camp was to be set up. The women, travelling more slowly because they had to haul and pull the group's equipment and possessions, brought up the rear.³⁹ When they reached the spot marked by the men, they set up camp while awaiting the hunters' return. It is sometimes mentioned that one of the ways to spend this particular time was playing Gwich'in swing, *#'yah iival*, as well as sliding downhill; these appear to have been among the women's favorite winter games. "I remember each time we moved, after the chores were done (setting up camp, getting firewood, and so on) the women would play. Sometimes, they made swings and they would swing. At the time this was their only recreation."⁴⁰ When the hunters had been successful, they would return to camp with whatever they were able to carry. What Sahlins refers to as 'generalized reciprocity'—that is to say in the case hand, the redistribution of food—usually took the form of a feast.⁴¹ It was customary to hand over the proceeds of one's labor to some renowned hunter or, when the successful hunter was unmarried, to his parents, for distribution to the group. It was at this point that physical skills exemplified by the successful hunt could be converted through the disposition into symbolic capital: "...the parent [made] a speech commending him before the people."⁴² The feast then commenced,⁴³ and when everybody had been fed, the donor suggested playing some game, "asking the people which one it should be. Everyone says the bouncing game,"⁴⁴ *akàii datchuu* ('the bouncing game is on'). Gwich'in swing aside, the 'bouncing game,' wrestling, and the stick pull were the most popular games to be played during such feasts.

"On warm days, it went on for hours."⁴⁵ — The *akàii* was reminiscent of the modern trampoline as well as of the Inuit blanket toss, but it was rather more difficult to execute, because the blanket, a piece of mooseskin folded over several times, was only about 30cm square in size. It was sus-



Ross 1979

Illustration 2 Artist's Representation of the *akàll*
The drawing was produced by Gwich'in artist William Bonnetplume

pended at a height of about 1.2m above ground. The player had to be able to jump onto the blanket without touching it with his hands. After he had jumped onto the blanket, spectators surrounding it pushed downward on the ropes, at the same time beginning to sing. Once he had regained his footing on the *akàii*, the spectators let go of the ropes, and the player on the blanket shot up into the air.⁴⁶ If he wanted to indicate that he had not been 'bounced' high enough, he could shout, '*viizhii' dohchuu!*' that is, 'bring it up [the *akàii*]!'; or, '*vizhi' dohchuu yuunkagiikhii!*' ('pull harder!'). This could make things fairly difficult. On one occasion, old Abraham Vaneltsi of Fort McPherson had hardly jumped onto the blanket when the people shouted, '*yuunkagiikhii!*' and let go of the ropes—he fell off immediately, much to the delight of everybody present.⁴⁷ As the player on the blanket could be propelled several meters into the air, this could be a fairly dangerous affair; the spectators would catch a player who lost his balance and tumbled off the blanket. Oblate missionary Émile Petitot's description of the game indicates that this must have been a lively affair indeed: "A ses [the jumper's] cris désespérés se joignent les rires frénétiques des joueurs [those pushing down on the ropes], les trépignement des spectateurs qui font de ce jeu la scène la plus animée et la plus sauvage qui se puisse voir. Il est des Loucheux fort adroits qui se font berner volontairement, et sans en souffrir, vu que par leur légèreté ils retombent toujours sur leurs pieds, et fond des bonds prodigieux sans jamais dépasser les limites de la peau."⁴⁸

Players were judged for the number and difficulty of their jumps, or 'bounces.' Petitot's observation implies that the Gwich'in were considered to be more highly skilled at this game than athletes from the Sahtu where the game was also played.⁴⁹ The most highly skilled players are reputed to have been able to perform somersaults. In his day, old Christopher Colin of Fort McPherson was known as one of the best *akàii* players; Anglican Minister Edward Sittichinli was also considered to be an expert jumper.⁵⁰ Bay trader Hardisty saw the game played in the 1850s, but he almost certainly exaggerated in claiming that the blanket was suspended 6m above ground:

Four trees are selected, forming as nearly as possible a square of about thirty feet, to which strong leather cords are tied diagonally as tight as possible, about twenty feet from the ground. Where the cords cross a piece of leather about eight inches square is tied securely on, on which each in his turn is required to stand. The least pressure sends the person in the air perhaps a couple of feet, when he comes down the second time on the piece of leather. The cords being suddenly distended with his weight, the 'centre coup' will shoot him up perpendicularly in the air, perhaps a dozen feet. Now is the time of danger, for if he is not expert, or is not able to keep himself straight, he may come down a height of perhaps twenty or thirty feet on his head to the ground. The object is to see who will fall oftenest perpendicularly on his feet on the little leather table without breaking his neck, I might say...⁵¹

The frequent association of the *akàii* with feasting and revelry in these accounts evokes connotations of what in the contact-traditional life-style constituted communal affluence and temporary material security. By contrast, the *akàii* also played a role in times of famine. Here, the game was a tool for the application of medicine power which was employed to reverse the group's fortune. During periods of intense cold, in particular during January and February, temperatures would often stay at 50° or 60°C below zero for several weeks. In such conditions, the air carried even the lightest noise very far, making it impossible for a hunter to approach a moose or caribou to within the range of his bow or spear.⁵² It was therefore difficult to obtain a sufficient amount of meat during these periods. It was at such times that the people would ask a medicine person to play *akàii*. This might enable him to either foresee an imminent change in the weather or to actually effect it. The people assembled and, according to Mrs. Mary Francis, began to sing variations of the following song:

*John Doe, viizhii duuh ch'uuh,
viizhii duuh ch'uuh, viizhii duuh ch'uuh.
akàii dalchuuh—viizhii duuh ch'uuh.
John Doe viizhii duuh ch'uuh.*⁵³

I am not sure, however, whether this was not a later form which came to be a part of the New Year's feasts sponsored by the Hudson's Bay trader and the resident missionaries. By 1920, the custom had developed that on New Year's day those people who stayed in the community would go from door to door to collect food for the customary communal New Year's feast. "John Doe"

was usher for the church in Aklavik,⁵⁴ and on a given occasion, the name would be replaced with the name of the inhabitant or family of the house who through the song were asked to contribute to the feast. On the other hand, Mrs. Francis mentioned that she learned the song from "Mrs. Koosh [who] sang this *akàii* song and I remember it."⁵⁵ This points to a form of the game in use early in the contact-traditional period, well before the turn of the century. Lazarus Sittichinli likewise noted that supplicatory songs were sung in connection with the game. "The real reason was to call for warmer weather and food. A medicine man would be approached to put one up in times of famine. He would jump onto the *akàii* as the people sang ... [something like] 'bring us warmer weather, better times'."⁵⁶ Mrs. Annie B. Robert suggests that the song evoked the image of 'something being put in my mouth;' to the extent that this symbolizes the act of feeding, the image would be consistent with the general supplicatory character of the song.⁵⁷ Mrs. Stewart of Aklavik corroborates this, pointing out that the song was given to the Gwich'in by 'Boy-in-the-Moon,' a central protagonist of Eastern Gwich'in mythological narrative, specifically to be used as a means to ward off starvation.⁵⁸

The practical logic of the *akàii* held that in tying the blanket to four trees, the trees would begin to sway under the impact of the medicine person jumping on the blanket. Trees swaying in the breeze indicated a change in the weather, ending the intense stillness of periods of cold weather, promising a rise in temperature, and raising hopes for a successful hunt;⁵⁹ the key concept of the song anticipating this expected change was *nizheeni il*, meaning approximately, 'let the weather turn warmer.'⁶⁰ In this instance the position of *akàii* in the field of traditional games was determined by the articulation of forms of capital from two distinct fields: by the actualization of its attributes proper, that is to say, physical skills; and by attributes of the field of medicine power as these specifically related to subsistence production. Relations of cooperation and of authority were simultaneously contained in this single event. The medicine person utilized physical capital for the benefit of the whole group—in the old days, according to Cass, medicine people were indeed considered to be among the best jumpers.⁶¹ The outcome was thus dependent on the display of individual skills, but the very nature of the activity allowed for the valorization of these skills only in terms of the player's contribution to the common good. At the same time, the very possibility to employ physical capital valorized in the field of games in this manner was linked to the possession of the rarest form of cultural capital in Gwich'in culture, i.e., medicine power, and not just to the physical skills distinguishing a competent *akàii* player. The reproduction of relations of authority was thus integrated even into the structure of an ultimately cooperative venture. — I might note in passing that the resiliency of the game's signifying force is attested to by the fact that during a traditional games workshop held at Fort McPherson in the winter of 1976—that is to say, more than a hundred years after the commencement of mission work in the western Arctic—old-timers were reluctant to openly discuss this aspect of *akàii*, for fear of antagonizing the then resident Anglican missionary. It did not help matters that when the old people demonstrated the game, the tempera-

ture actually rose more than 35°C within the short span of a few hours, much to the old-timers' obvious consternation.⁶²

The power relationships reproduced when *akàii* was played as a medicine game thus intersected with cooperative structures which otherwise structured *akàii* much as they characterized other games occupying a prominent position in such feasts, such as the stick pull, the pole push and wrestling competitions. Rather than from the point of view of 'mobility,' the distributional properties produced and articulated by these latter games can perhaps better be understood from the point of view of 'flexibility,' that is to say, the non-hierarchical aspects of contact-traditional Gwich'in social organization, to which corresponded, it will be remembered, the disposition of 'bush consciousness' to avoid overt comparison in any domain of practice.

2.3. Flexibility

The case so far has rested on an analysis of forms of valorization produced at the point of articulation of the fields of subsistence production, of games, and of medicine power; these valorizations were conceptualized in terms of cooperative and competitive practices—be it through the evocation of a mode of travel as an experiential orientation, be it through the overdetermination of competitive running in the context of cooperative subsistence production, or through the cooperative use of medicine power within determinate relations of authority. The argument can be extended by considering those instances where the potential for cooperative practice was implied by the games' formal properties, that is to say, by their rules.

A good example of this is what, for lack of a better term, I refer to as the 'circular challenging order'⁶³ of traditional wrestling, *nihitir'oovàadi*, as it was played during the feasts referred to previously. The game was so popular that Osgood refers to it as the "national game" of the Gwich'in.⁶⁴ A detailed description has been provided by Hardisty:

Their wrestling matches are commenced generally by two little boys. When one of them is thrown he retires and another, a little bigger, takes his place. As soon as he has thrown his opponent he rises up quickly and places himself in preparation for the next, who will make a sudden rush at him so as to get an advantageous hold before he is prepared and while still panting from his previous exertion. Still, if he be the stronger or more expert, he may knock down his second adversary, also the third or perhaps the fourth before he is thrown, when he retires and leaves the field to his conqueror, who in his turn will continue to throw as many as he can, one after the other, until he, too, perhaps from exhaustion is obliged to give way to a fresher or more vigorous opponent. The combatants rise in gradation until all the men have had their turn, and one, the last, remains alone on the ground with the honour of being the best wrestler of the tribe.⁶⁵

The signifying force of interpersonal, competitive comparisons within the context of an immediate physical confrontation—a context of the 'highest possibility' for the expression of interpersonal super- and subordination—was obviously mediated by the fact that the loss in a bout could be

attributed as much to the loser's exhaustion as to the winner's superior skills, since even the best wrestler might not necessarily have been able to dispose of a number of lesser opponents, in rapid succession. Inversely, not the best wrestler need necessarily have been the winner. The display of strength and agility exhibited by the winner of such a contest was appreciated: "Sometimes a wrestler—if he's good—can stay in the centre for a long time. This wrestler is known as one of the strongest persons in the camp;" but there was little overt recognition of this fact: "He did not win any medals and nobody made a big thing out of it."⁶⁶ It is important to note that in the same statement, Lazarus Sittichinli proceeds to carry out an evaluation of the forms of physical skill the people *did* tend to make 'a big thing out of,' and concludes with a comment on the importance of achievement in running: "The only thing is everyone knows who the strongest, the toughest or the best runner is."⁶⁷ The reasons for this form of valorization have been discussed above.

Furthermore, the absence of hierarchization in, and the flexibility of, traditional social structure was expressed by the fact that it was possible for everybody to participate in the same competition, even young children.⁶⁸ No division into performance classes was evident in the circular challenge order; an attempt was made to initially match opponents of approximately equal strength: "They pick them out according to size, not age."⁶⁹ At the same time, it is obvious that only adult participants could expect to reach the later stages of the competition. Such an arrangement diminished the significance of winning and interpersonal comparison inasmuch as the latter derives its signifying force predominantly from the fact that a state of initial equality relative to skill and strength exists between the opponents. This *modus operandi* appears to have been a largely self-regulating mechanism, operating on the implicit rule that one would avoid pitting oneself against a drastically weaker opponent: "When they are wrestling they'd all join in, and whoever wants to try out waits until he thinks he's ready or when he feels he can take on the wrestler on the floor."⁷⁰

The stick pull, *nalàizrak*, also implied the levelling principle of the 'circular challenge order.' For this game, a birch stick of about 20 to 30cm in length, with a diameter of 2.5cm at the centre, tapering off towards the end where the diameter was no larger than 0.5cm, was used. In order to make the exercise more difficult, the stick was hardened in the fire, polished, and greased with caribou or bear fat.⁷¹ Each competitor grasped one end of the stick, and upon a signal, attempted to pull the stick out of the opponent's hand. Occasionally, the game was organized as a team contest. A team consisting of six competitors assembled inside a tent, an opposing team of equal strength on the outside. The challengers on the outside attempted to pull the stick 'out of the tent,' the team on the inside attempted to keep the stick 'in the tent.' The winner of a bout immediately took on the next challenger designated by the 'captain' of the opposing team, he was not given any time to regain his strength. Alternatively, the game would be played in two tents, each team assembling in one of them. The winner of a bout immediately ran across to the other tent to take on the challenger waiting for him.⁷² In a variation described by Osgood, the contestants arranged themselves in two lines of about ten players each. The first two competitors pulled, and the winner took on the

next challenger from among those lined up on the previous loser's side.⁷³ The levelling principle of *nihkitr'oovàadi* was implied in either form of organization. This was still evident at a workshop held in Fort McPherson in the winter of 1976, where the competition was opened by the young boys and gradually involved the stronger and more powerful competitors.

In the early decades of this century, Andrew Koe and Andrew Wilson were known as some of the strongest players,⁷⁴ and at a meeting of Van Tat and Teet'it people on the Porcupine River, minister Jim Sittichinli managed to wrest the stick away from a particularly strong opponent who had been able to hang on to it "for a long time."⁷⁵ This happened immediately after Jim had read service (that is to say, the game had probably been in progress while service was being read), and he had to hurry to take off his collar before entering the competition, so eager was he to play.

To conclude my remarks on the articulation of physical and symbolic capital reproduced during *nihkitr'oovàadi* and *nalàizrak*, I might add that of the 'important' Gwich'in traditional games, wrestling was the only one which involved direct physical contact, not to say, combat, between the opponents. This stands in marked contrast to the games of the Inuit, which involved a multitude of such contacts, predominantly pulls and pushes which often served to test the opponent's pain endurance.⁷⁶ I would suggest that in Gwich'in traditional games, the absence of such forms of involvement can be understood as that aspect of the *hexis*—expressed in the field of games—which corresponded to the non-intervening nature of 'bush consciousness.' It is instructive to note that an analogous situation obtained in the field of education; Gwich'in educators did not resort to physical intervention of any kind. The Gwich'in were familiarized with this particular educational device only in the mission schools. By contrast, two traditional games existed which involved direct physical contact on a regular basis, viz., shinny, *k'adzihshì*, and Gwich'in football, *nehkak cho*. As early as 1848, Alexander Murray at Fort Yukon observed the rough style of play, noting in the post journal that "Hoole [Houle] while playing at football last night dislocated one of his toes which I fear will disable him for work for some time."⁷⁷ Overall, however, there is a tendency among old-timers to view these latter games more as lighter amusements played in a more incidental manner, whenever the opportunity arose; they were not intimately linked to the significant sequence of feasting, dancing, and games described above. The old-timers do not reflect on these games in terms of the previously discussed forms of valorizations, pointing out that these games were typically played by 'boys and young men' only.⁷⁸ This is also true of mooseskin ball, *nehkak' níchii na'trodandak*, which, at any rate, did not have specified competitive goals and was more communal in nature, involving children, women, and men—old and young.⁷⁹

3. External Relations

The organizational structure of wrestling, *nihkitr'oovàadi*, placed an implicit emphasis on cooperation rather than competition. This also becomes evident when one considers the game's position in encounters between groups who met on the trail. Here, as was already noted, wrestling was used as

a common form of greeting expressing mutually peaceful intentions. This custom was maintained well into the first decades of the 20th century. Andrew Kunnizzi reminisces on meeting with an old friend somewhere on the trail in the Blackstone area in the 1920s:

... I heard someone yelling so I stopped and looked back. They said, 'A stranger is here!' We never saw other people for a long time and when I heard there was a stranger I ... turned and ran all the way to the fire place. As I was nearing I recognized who it was. It was a man named Joseph Tzun, and James Francis. I was still running and I was yelling Joseph's name. As I got there I grabbed him and just started wrestling with him, that's how happy I was to see him.⁸⁰

When she was a young girl, Mrs. Christie Thompson likewise observed that two men meeting on the trail in the Blackstone area, wrestled with each other by way of exchanging greetings; this would have happened around 1910. Julian André remembers an encounter of Gwichyah and 'Slavey' (probably Bear Lake people connected to Fort Good Hope) where the men greeted each other by engaging in wrestling matches, and Jim Koe also notes the Gwich'in to have been good wrestlers.⁸¹

These games not only played a role in such friendly encounters between members of family units, they also were of some importance in encounters between larger units, such as bands assembling at the summer meeting grounds, (and, later, at the trading posts). Here, they were likewise employed as a means to mediate tensions and establish, at least temporarily, peaceful relations between groups who at one time or another might have been at war with each other. The Gwich'in look back on an eventful history of peaceful trade relations alternating with periods of hostilities and counter-hostilities with some of the neighboring groups. The Mackenzie Inuit (Inuvialuit), in particular, were enemies of long standing.⁸² A number of reasons have been given to explain the development of hostilities. They are said to date back to either the application of hostile magic; a deception practiced upon an Inuk by a Gwich'in man; or conflicts over women. Hostilities were often kept alive over long periods of time by acts of revenge and counter-revenge; the mourning cycle for a slain Gwich'in really only ended only upon "a death outside the community, usually—although not always—the killer."⁸³ Symbolic capital in particular, which could be acquired through bravery in war, was at stake in such encounters.⁸⁴

Tensions within and between Gwich'in groups and bands also occurred frequently, predominantly caused by conflicts over women. Mention has already been made of Vigwathrel, the outcast, who spent his life in voluntary exile out of fear of further aggression from a more powerful man who had stolen his wife. Post manager Murray at Fort Yukon likewise noted an instructive sequence which occurred during October and November 1847: "One of the indians, here lately, passed on his way to the lower band [Gwichaa], those he was with having taken his wife. Women are very scarce amongst the indians here & most of their quarrels originate from taking each others wives."⁸⁵ When Murray refused to intervene on this man's behalf, the latter threatened to call in

In the last years of the nineteenth century stories were current at McPherson of raids the Eskimos made far up the Big [Mackenzie] River, killing any Indians they could find, in revenge for Indian raids upon their camps. Julia Chiacha a woman of about 60 when I first knew her in 1895, was one of two who escaped death in such a reprisal some fifty years previously. Her family and other Indians were camped on the Husky River fishing when several boats of Eskimo, returning from a trading trip to the Fort, passed down calling friendly greetings as they floated by. Proceeding beyond hearing, the Eskimo camped and waited for the night, which at that season would not be dark, but when they judged the camp would be asleep the Eskimo men stole noiselessly back and massacred the sleepers. Julia escaped by running into the bush. A moose hunter also survived. ... The graves of the slaughtered Indians were to be seen about 1910 near McPherson. This was said to be the last of such raids as the Hudson's Bay Company used their influence to attain peace between the tribes. Some years later the Eskimo leaders arrived bearing gifts and a formal peace was declared.

— Charles E. Whittaker, Memoranda of the Mission to the Mackenzie River Eskimos.

Vignette 3 Gwich'in - Inuit Warfare

"his friends [to] take her or kill his rival."⁸⁶ More threats were uttered, but the tensions eased when "... a party of 4 men including the chief of the lower band arrived. ... As the young chief has the woman stolen lately from another mentioned a few days back, an attempt was about to be made to recover her, by her former husband. Great threats were uttered by both parties, but they are now come to an understanding & the lady is to be given up, on payment of a certain amount of beads. The bargain is made by the woman's father. Her husband is off to await his rival ... for the purpose of taking her or killing him."⁸⁷ Frequent references to such incidents indicate that this was a potential source of conflicts and tensions between the bands,⁸⁸ and at new Rampart House, missionary Robert McDonald in 1870 and post manager Joe Hodgson in 1883 actually witnessed altercations ending in the death of one of the opponents, respectively.⁸⁹

Lastly, changes in trading patterns and the concomitant changes in relations between neighboring groups brought about as a consequence of the Hudson's Bay Company's arrival, in themselves occasionally contributed to the rise of tensions, although the expansion of the fur trade ultimately led to the complete cessation of hostilities.⁹⁰ Franklin, in giving presents to the Mackenzie Inuit during his second expedition into the north, put himself in immediate danger of being attacked by the Gwich'in who viewed his action as a threat to their role as middlemen between the Inuit and the trading post at Fort Good Hope.⁹¹ Before leaving on his expedition down the Porcupine River to establish the new post of Fort Yukon, Alexander Hunter Murray noted that "our going there is making a mighty fuss amongst the indians, all sorts of rumours are flying about—some for, and others, against—one tribe is anxious for us to go, and another threaten to cut us off to burn our Fort &c...."⁹²

For all these reasons, meetings between groups could be fraught with ambiguities, and mutually peaceful intentions were expressed by means of more or less regularized forms of behavior, specifically through songs (and, later, the firing of rifles), speeches, dances, and games. Murray, who at La Pierre House and Fort Yukon found himself at an intersection of all these ambiguities, mentions

these elements of peaceful encounters quite frequently and in some detail. En route from La Pierre House to the future site of Fort Yukon, he and his party met a group of Dagoo or Van Tat Gwich'in who commenced dancing in order to express their peaceful intentions.⁹³ The arrival of a larger group at the new site some weeks later occasioned a number of formalities:

About 4 'clock this morning we were aroused by reports of fire arms below ... 20 canoes hove in sight around the Point and soon paddled up along shore to our encampment all joining in song and most unearthly yells. As soon as they were on the bank, the leader commenced his harangues. There were 15 with their wives & families. I gave each man 3 in of tobacco after which the dancing began and lasted for half an hour.⁹⁴

Songs, shouting, and the firing of guns from a distance were used as the initial element to establish communication. Later that same day, a second group arrived in the vicinity of the Fort. Murray instructed his men not to reply to the salute given by the newcomers, "but the Indians here said it was always the custom with them when they came in peace to discharge their pieces and if we did not return the salute they would consider us to be enemies. We then fired 5 guns in answer to theirs, which was responded to from the fleet of canoes, now close at hand, by a shout which might be heard for miles."⁹⁵ (By contrast, a group of Han visiting the Fort some six weeks later, arrived in complete silence to indicate their unfriendly intentions.⁹⁶)

The initial contact was tentative; alighting from their canoes, the newcomers slowly "formed on the bank in single file with their chief in front, women and children in the rear, and danced forward by degrees until in front of my tent, when they continued at it for upward of half an hour without intercession."⁹⁷ The initial dance was followed by lengthy speeches by the leaders of the groups involved.⁹⁸ The mastery of oratory constituted a form of cultural capital characteristic of members of the chiefly class.⁹⁹ Encounters between groups constituted a significant occasion for the actualization of such linguistic capital, but Murray was in no mood for oratory. His retrospective *Journal* indicates his exasperation when, after speeches by several of the newcomers, "the principal chief walked to the front and *made a speech*, the longest I ever listened to, except perhaps a cameronian sermon ... The interpreter could not repeat one fourth of it."¹⁰⁰ At the conclusion of these formalities, "the dancing commenced in earnest,"¹⁰¹ and was kept up for several hours. The singing continued throughout the night.

Speeches and dances often occurred in conjunction with games. Two incidents demonstrate the signifying force of games during group encounters. In one of these, they directly expressed the establishment of peaceful relations, while in the second, a wrestling competition, indicating ostensibly peaceful intentions, was employed as the pretext for a surprise attack. In July 1847, a group of Van Tat arrived at the Fort;¹⁰² soon, tensions developed between them and a Gwichaa leader over the imputed killing of the latter's sister by a member of the Van Tat party. Tensions subsided when it was learned that the woman in question had drowned. The restitution of peaceful relations



Illustration 3 Gwich'in Round Dance at Fort Yukon, 1847

"... in a short time [they] issued forth arrayed in all their fineries, and commenced to a regular *Break Down*, all joining. ... they danced always in a circle, the only difference in their steps, gestures, and songs, of which latter they have a great variety." — Alexander Murray

coincided with the arrival of yet another group, and the congregated bands played and danced up a storm. During four sleepless nights, the hapless fur traders

... witnessed some of their great dances, and gymnastic [sic] games between the two parties; such a dancing and singing, leaping and wrestling, whooping and yelling, I have never before heard or seen. This was always persevered in all night and although amusing to us at first, by being continued became very tiresome, we could not sleep at night for the noise they made, although requested by the men, I would not ask them to desist in case of giving offense: these people consider it the greatest treat they can give us, by carrying on their games in our camp, they said they had not been so happy for many years.¹⁰³

The second incident took place some years later, around 1850. It involved the powerful Gwich'aa war leader Shahnyaati', portrayed by Anglican missionary McDonald as "the terror of the other Indians,"¹⁰⁴ and by the American trader Mercier as "a man of braveness or more than that, ferocity."¹⁰⁵ Under his leadership, the band frequently mounted raids on neighboring groups, in particular on the Neets'aa'i, inducing Murray to refer to the Gwich'aa as "great boys for fighting."¹⁰⁶ On one particular occasion, Shahnyaati' had conceived the "diabolical plan of treacherously massacring"¹⁰⁷ a group of Nets'aa'i who were fishing in the vicinity:

... here is the ruse he employed to accomplish his evil design: Before reaching these poor victims, who suspected nothing, Sénaté [Shahnyaati'] made each of his men take two knives, of which one was in sight in a sheath hung from a shoulder belt, as is the custom among all the savages of the Youkon, and the other knife hidden in their clothing. This done, he sent two of

his men in advance to announce to these poor fishermen that they should not be alarmed to soon see him arrive with his men, that he came in friendship, desiring for a long time to make peace with them. Believing that they were on a mission of peace, the poor Gens du Large [Neets'aai] received Sénaté and his men with open arms, and, as is the custom on such occasions, they sang, feasted, danced, and exchanged presents, etc., etc. And as it is also the custom among all the savages of the Youkon to wrestle when they meet with each other, Sénaté proposed to the Gens du Large that they wrestle together, but he said, 'Is it not possible that in wrestling with our knives, someone would become angry?' All disarmed themselves of their knives, and when they were all held around the waist, at a signal from Sénaté, each of his men pulled out his knife which had been hidden, and each killed his man.¹⁰⁸

There is, lastly, a story in Gwich'in historical narrative which also brings out the position of games in respect of the elements of ambiguity surrounding meetings between groups. This particular story contains certain pieces of information which make it possible to tentatively place it in the early proto-historical period rather than in the indeterminate 'mythological age.' In explicitly focussing on ethno-historical information which might be gleaned from such narrative, I follow an approach first suggested by Slobodin.¹⁰⁹

Zheh Geetlitt [Zheh Geetl'it], an important leader of the Van Tat (or Dagoo), was a man of great wealth. He decided to stage a games festival for all the people in what is now Yukon Territory.¹¹⁰ This would be no ordinary affair, as he intended to stage "the biggest games around."¹¹¹ One of the groups to participate was a band of Dagoo Gwich'in. When they arrived at the stated place, however, they found that a number of fires had been set on the bank of the Porcupine such that they formed an almost impassable firewall which they managed to penetrate only with great difficulty. Such had been Zheh Geetlitt's mistrust of the visitors that he felt compelled to attempt and keep them away, notwithstanding the fact that he had invited them himself, and that they were led by his own nephew, Nilee' Dilchoo. Peaceful relations, however, were restored after an intervention by Zheh Geetlitt's wife. The games commenced and lasted for several days; it is said that "there were thousands of people there."¹¹² The main event of the festival could be described as a form of weightlifting. The competitors carried a heavy ball made from pemmican towards a line marked out at a certain distance. Such was Zheh Geetlitt's strength, that he was able to carry not only the meat ball, but also his grandson across the line, thereby winning the contest. Waiting for him at the finish line was the child's father, his son-in-law Vigwahtral [Vi'it Gwatral]. Since Vigwahtral, so the narrative states, had at that time already adopted his solitary life-style, none of those present at the feast recognized him. Zheh Geetlitt welcomed him, then left him and his grandson to enter another of the competitions in progress. When he returned, Vigwahtral had departed, leaving his son behind. After several days of feasting and games, the visitors left for their home territories.¹¹³

This story reiterates in narrative form the argument advanced above, viz., that the signifying force of the field of games served to signal the establishment of friendly relationships during group

meets. The ambiguity surrounding such meets is brought out by the fact that this specific mode of valorization was invoked even where the groups were connected by affinal ties, as was the case here. Mention of Vigwahltrel, secondly, is understood by Gwich'in story tellers as an indicator of the narrative's historical veracity, as both Mrs. Peter's and Ronnie Pascal's narration close with a comment on Vigwahltrel's solitary life on the Porcupine River. There is mention, furthermore, in the Fort Yukon post journal of a 'great feast' on *Shiinjik*. In November 1847, "two Indians arrived on their way to a great feast that is shortly to be given by one of the Indians on Porcupine River ... there is to be a large assemblage of the different bands around."¹¹⁴ Two more Gwich'in passed the Fort on the subsequent day, and on the 19th, one of the chiefs of the Van Tat arrived; "... he is anxious that some of us attend the feast about to be given & as it may please the Indians Mr. [Alexander] Mackenzie & the Interpreter will be allowed to go."¹¹⁵ Mackenzie, Houle and Perro left on the subsequent day, and returned four days later; "... 13 lodges were congregated. A great number of moose and deer skins were collected to be given away as presents."¹¹⁶ It is clear that Murray's men attended a potlatch. While it is impossible to determine whether the journal entries refer to the same event as the stories recapitulated above, neither the Fort Yukon nor Fort McPherson journals contain any other such reference. This appears to have been a potlatch of some significance, as is also indicated by the fact that the event is remembered in Gwich'in historical narrative. The dates of the journal entries, at any rate, mark a point in time at which Vigwahltrel had probably taken up his solitary life-style.

The contact-traditional games were defined, firstly, in their relation to the economic field. The high degree of mobility characterizing the latter was articulated in the field of games by a predominance of games whose technical outcome determinants were functionally homologous to many tasks of subsistence production. The strong emphasis on the display of physical skills was mediated by the flexibility of contact-traditional social arrangement which was expressed at the level of individual disposition as the tendency of 'bush consciousness' to avoid overt individual comparison in any domain of social practice, including the field of games. Power relations, by contrast, were reproduced through games which were employed as medicine devices, but here, as well, the reproduction of relations of authority was mediated by the overall cooperative context determining the occasion.

The argument so far has largely focussed on the efficacy of 'bush consciousness' for the generation of predominantly cooperative forms of behavior evident in games. It remains to be considered how these value orientations themselves were inculcated. In other words, the position of games in processes of education and enculturation and familial socialization needs to be examined. On the basis of the information available, this can only be done in the form of a general delineation, but it is possible to relate educational processes to the 'structuring structures' of mobility and flexibility.

4. Education

Several successive stages in the educational process can be distinguished within contact-traditional culture. Infants spent much of their earliest life time in a crib board, from which they were released when they were about two years of age. The subsequent period was characterized by a high degree of permissiveness, and by free interaction between boys and girls. When the children reached the age of seven or eight, a tendency became evident to associate more closely with age-mates of the same rather than the opposite gender. Puberty marked a clear demarcation. For girls, the rite of passage consisted of a period of seclusion lasting several months,¹¹⁷ after which time they had reached marriageable age. Boys left the parents' house and moved into a lodge which they shared with their age mates. Here, their education continued under the supervision of an elder, whose educational authority rested on proven practical mastery, on the symbolic and cultural capital acquired as a successful hunter or warrior. At the end of this period, the boys had reached the stage of adulthood.

4.1. Mobility

The relationship of the field of children's games to the mobility of contact-traditional culture can be examined from a number of perspectives. Firstly, the fact that children's activities occurred mostly out of doors corresponded to the orientation towards the land implied by 'travelling:' "The children would play outdoors from morning until evening. The children were not allowed inside with their clothes ... Sometimes a piece of cold meat and water was given to the young and that was all they got until it was time to come in. This is the way the children were brought up—to be strong and stand cold weather."¹¹⁸ For boys in particular, a strong preponderance of activities involving the development of physical skills was evident, and this became more pronounced when they reached puberty. At that age, they had to leave the family home and move into a lodge with their age mates. This lodge was usually set up on the periphery of camp when the family groupings congregated, and the boys lived here for a period of up to three years.¹¹⁹ Under the strict supervision of an elder, preferably an experienced and renowned hunter or warrior, the boys underwent rigorous physical training, "including a very frugal diet and long hours of hunting and scouting in almost all weathers. This regimen was phrased as necessary for a good hunter, traveller, and fighter."¹²⁰ They had to get up at dawn, guarding the camp against potential enemy attacks which were most likely to occur at this time of day. As a preparatory exercise for such altercations, the boys would dodge arrows fired at them by their peers. Sometimes, "fences were placed outside the tent over which they had to jump,"¹²¹ and among the Neets'ait and Van Tat, the 'stake race' referred to previously was used as an extension of this latter exercise. A row of stakes or poles was placed into the bed of a creek or river which the boys had to cross by jumping from pole to pole.¹²²

In accordance with the important technical and symbolic valuation attached to movement and travelling discussed in detail above, great emphasis was placed on running long distances. Running, as an athletic and subsistence skill was of such major importance that certain proscriptions

were attached to the activity; these applied in particularly to the teenagers who lived under the elder's supervision. "They had to learn to run great distances and the only water they were allowed to drink during the day was a squirrel's skullful at morning and evening."¹²³ This was also true of the Neets'aiti, where the boys "were discouraged from undue eating, drinking or sleeping, and were forbidden to eat the young of animals, watery foods such as berries, or to drink hot water."¹²⁴ Gwich'in old-timers themselves viewed some of these proscriptions as a technical necessity, "old people tell the young that if they eat much grease they will perspire when they run (perspiration, which freezes, is a danger in the arctic climate). ... young people, they say, wouldn't be able to run much if they drank a great deal of water."¹²⁵ These injunctions were still known to, but no longer followed by, the young Roddy Peters' peers, as he observed at a hunting camp set up at the confluence of Rat River and Bear Creek. Numerous caribou had been shot, and

I saw some young people there cooking young caribou so they were talking about the older people. They said they were talking about home—when we took these young caribou home for our parents, some of them told us not to eat it It was no good for young people to eat young caribou, because when they grew up they would get weak and when they walked with snowshoes they would get weak and get thirsty quick. They wouldn't hunt right that way So our people or parents don't allow us to eat young calf caribou.¹²⁶

As is implied by these proscriptions, the specifically technical aspects of subsistence hunting were also contained in these exercises. This is expressed by a game which descriptively can be referred to as 'caribou chase' or 'moose chase.'¹²⁷ One of the boys dragged a piece of mooseskin along the ground, being pursued by a group of boys armed with short spears. The pursuers threw their spears at the piece of skin, attempting to pin it to the ground. "If the boy pulling the skin gets away, he is considered very smart."¹²⁸ A target game played by the boys likewise directly imitated the caribou hunt. One boy, the 'caribou,' lay down on the ground at a certain distance, pretending to be asleep. The other boys took a stick, perhaps one meter in length, and deeply notched it at ten centimeter intervals, such that the pieces almost broke off. Swinging a shorter and stouter stick which was used as a club, the player took the top piece off the long stick and attempted to hit the 'caribou' with it. "It was a fun game, but looking back, it could have been dreadful if it had hit someone in the eye or face area."¹²⁹ Target games such as hoop and pole, the spear throw, the bow and arrow shoot, the snow snake, and the stick throw had similar functional characteristics, preparing the boys for the technical aspects of the hunt.

Lastly, and indirectly related to subsistence production as well, a number of role games existed which were said to increase the children's knowledge of their natural environment. In 'Caribou Eyes,' *indee*, sometimes also referred to as *neets'ee tl'yaa*,¹³⁰ 'It' (the 'Eye') in the centre was surrounded by a circle of players holding each other's hand (see Illustration 11, page 180). 'The Eye' made the round of the circle, asking each player the following questions:

- First round: 'Whose nest is this, *jii jidii t'oo*?' — In his reply, the player in the circle had to be able to name various (land) animals, or, in a variation, the names of various birds.
- Second round: 'Whose knife case [scabbard] is this, *jii jidii srii thoh*?' — The reply had to state the names of the various species of fish.
- Third round: 'Who snared this for you, *jii juudin neenjit yuudlai*?' — "My neighbor here [the player next in line] snared it for me, but he cooked it while I was still asleep this morning and he gobbled it all up."¹³¹
- The game ended when the 'Eye' attempted to break out of the circle. He was chased by the other players, who, when they succeeded in catching him, would pretend to 'gobble' him or her up.¹³²

In a similar game, a piece of cloth was placed on the head of the player in the centre. The player was then asked what she would do to obtain this. The stipulated task usually emphasized co-operative endeavors, such as collecting and cutting wood for old people who no longer were able to do so, or providing one of the old people with meat.¹³³ Mrs. Annie B. Robert remembers having played this game "in Old Robert's tent,"¹³⁴ while the group passed the winter in the mountains hunting caribou. Mrs. Annie G. Robert would often play the game with "Joanne McDonald's father ... but we could never catch him."¹³⁵

In their relationship to the technical expediencies of subsistence production in the Gwich'in hunting economy, these role games placed a distinct emphasis on group-integrated interaction; there appears to have been but little room for a competitive focus. Just how strongly the competitive elements were emphasized in the tests of physical skill such as the bow and arrow shoot, is more difficult to ascertain retrospectively. These activities held potential for an emphasis on competitive forms of interaction, but, as has already been mentioned, Gwich'in tended not 'to make a big deal' out of this.¹³⁶ The question can be clarified further by considering the articulation between the field of games with that of education in respect of the 'flexibility' of contact-traditional society; this requires in particular a consideration of the efficacy of 'bush consciousness.'

4.2. Flexibility

The flexibility of contact-traditional social arrangements found its expression in certain aspects of 'bush consciousness,' in particular in the dispositions referred to above as non-intervention, avoidance of explicit interpersonal comparison, and individual self-reliance (see page 46); these, in turn, were the generative principle of much cooperative behavior in the field of games. These same principles also shaped the implicit methods of educational action. By 'implicit' I mean that no formalized 'theory of education or educational method' was evident. As Bourdieu expresses it: "PA [pedagogic action] in a traditional society ... is accompanied neither by an ideological justification of PAu [pedagogic authority] as such, nor by technical reflection on the instruments of PA."¹³⁷ Among the Gwich'in, this was in particular indicated by the strong emphasis on imitation and observation. The observed or imitated behavior itself is 'practical behavior,' and not the 'planned' behavior of a formal educational environment.

The treatment of children in general was characterized by a great degree of permissiveness, that is to say, by a marked degree of non-intervention, on part of the parents. Children were rarely if ever physically punished, a verbal reprimand being usually considered sufficient to correct undesirable behavior.¹³⁸ Mason noted the Gwichaa to be "very careful and affectionate of their children ... As a rule the Indians spoil their own children. The words 'he no like' is considered enough argument against anything, from spanking to tooth-pulling, being done to the child."¹³⁹ Mitchell stated of contact-traditional forms of education among the Teet'it that "when it came to providing for their babies and looking after them those women were splendid mothers, and the fathers were just as kind and as proud of the youngsters as the mothers were."¹⁴⁰

Self-reliance, understood as a corollary of non-intervention, was implicit in the learning methods of imitation and observation by which children acquired practical cultural knowledge. Children's activities based on imitation and observation were often self-directed and self-initiated, "all the time the boys were training themselves to hunt and trap by experiment."¹⁴¹ Christopher Colin remembers that in the winter of 1898—that is to say, the year preceding Mitchell's travels during which the latter made the observations here quoted—Han, Van Tat, and Teet'it people assembled in the Wind River area for a communal caribou hunt. Staying in camp, he himself made a miniature bow and an arrow with a bone tip; he succeeded in killing a number of birds with it. He was about twelve years old at that time.¹⁴² While the children were often also instructed in these activities by their fathers, "they were overlooked *unostentatiously* ... and in the kindest way."¹⁴³ As has been noted above, many of these activities related to the various domains of subsistence production. Again, Mitchell describes this in some detail:

... their play was their education, because all the time they'd be making, we'll say, little tump-straps and practising carrying loads, or toy toboggans or snow-shoes or dead-falls, or weaving little nets out of willow bark. Sometimes they made beautiful toy bows, with bark quivers, and a perfect assortment of arrows, or sets of dog-harness, and you'd see them harness up a pup and drive him about.¹⁴⁴

These productive endeavors became increasingly important as the children grew older and acquired the skills necessary to master an increasing number of tasks. By the time they were seven or eight years old, their work was expected to make a contribution to the familial economy, "when the boys could carry a pack, they bloody well had to, and when the girls could look after the younger children or make moccasins or clothes, they had to do it, and do it well."¹⁴⁵ These new responsibilities would have developed at the time, as Slobodin points out, when boys as well as girls began to associate more regularly with age mates of the same gender.

Lastly, concerning the disposition to avoid overt inter-personal, competitive comparisons, it will be remembered that children were active participants in the games played during feasts; these games were organized according to the 'circular challenge order.' I have already mentioned that a disposition existed not to make a big thing out of winning these events, that is to say, out of the

comparative merits of super-and subordination in the field of games. This was implied by the procedure used which served to minimize the importance attached to winning, because the contest involved all members of the group. Everybody who wanted to participate could do so, thereby including in the same competition participants of vastly differing skill and performance levels. Although it would have been obvious to the children that they could not realistically hope to win these competitions, the 'fairness' of the procedure was not questioned.

4.3. Narrative

As an extension of the educational methods of imitation and observation, story telling was an important educational strategy in contact-traditional society. Encompassing Gwich'in historical knowledge, these stories produced a sense of cultural identity, while at the same time playing an important role in the inculcation of the proper moral values, that is to say, they provided elements for the proper symbolic construction of the social world. Learning often occurred "by imitation and indirection ... [and] stories were important as examples, precedents, and symbolic structures."¹⁴⁶

4.3.1. Narrative Practice

Mitchell had the opportunity to observe this repeatedly during the winter of 1898-99; the long evenings of the short days of winter were a favorite time for story telling: "... when the Indians were sitting round talking of hunting, snowshoeing, pulling loads, and so forth, the little eyes and ears were very much alive. They had no books and so they learned everything from the talk of the grown-up people and imbibed all the folk-lore and history of the tribe from hearing the stories told."¹⁴⁷

Story-telling, a cultural practice inculcating the generalized habitus, was at the same time a mode of valorization of a specific form of cultural and linguistic capital which articulated and reproduced relations of educational authority; the latter was based on generational seniority, often within the context of kinship connections. A story's plot was probably familiar to many people present on a given occasion,¹⁴⁸ but the culturally proper reproduction was a prerogative of the elders. Neil McDonald remembers that in his youth, "the old people ... would tell about long ago. ... they would tell about how people made their living in the hard way. They told these old-time stories of long ago so the young people would know and remember and never forget."¹⁴⁹ In Mrs. Katherine Peter's time, story telling "was done primarily by older men,"¹⁵⁰ and the same point is made by Mrs. Sarah Simon: "In olden days, women did not do the talking. Men talked."¹⁵¹ Osgood indicates both older men and women to have been the important story tellers; younger people, in any case, "play[ed] the lesser part in this pastime."¹⁵² This was congruent with the position of linguistic capital, i.e., the mastery of oratory, in other fields in which such capital was also an adjunct of positions of authority. I have already mentioned Murray's exasperation at the volubility characteristic of Gwich'in public oratory during the annual trade meets at Fort Yukon; his observation quoted on page 72 indicates that availability of linguistic capital correlated with social

authority: the highest-ranking chief made the longest speech. Robert Kennicott also noted that "when visiting the Indian camps [at Fort Yukon in 1862], as I have sometimes done, I have had long harangues with the Indians. They are great talkers, and fond of stories."¹⁵³ Sometimes men meeting on the trail—in particular men who did not usually meet very often—would engage in a story telling contest. The man who could tell the greatest number of stories was declared the winner.¹⁵⁴ The potential for personal distinction indicated by this latter custom was also implied by the great emphasis placed on individual style and delivery, rhetorical devices by which the story teller could achieve individual status and symbolic capital:

The Indians never talked while they ate, and after the meal was over they'd sit round the fire in silence for some time digesting and thinking. Then two or three other hunters would drop in quietly and sit down, and then everyone would get out their pipes and light up. ... I have the most vivid remembrance of the circle of keenly interested intellectual faces with the firelight rising and falling on them, and the boys in the background also listening intently—in fact, learning their business. ... all [were] keenly alive. The stories were wonderfully told in particularly beautiful forms of speech, and were always illustrated in a most dramatic way. ... It was all so realistic you felt you'd been there yourself!¹⁵⁵

Gwich'in narrative expressed the principles and values of the symbolic construction of the social world along certain axes. Through the division of the history of the world into different epochs, narrative established a sense of social and individual identity. Through its repeated treatment of moral as well as practical *topoi*, it contributed to the inculcation of the cultural arbitrary. That stories always provided entertainment and amusement, goes without saying.¹⁵⁶

4.3.2. *Epochs of History*

In terms of traditional narrative practice, Gwich'in did not perceive differences between the various kinds of stories, but it is possible on internal grounds to divide those narratives which deal with Gwich'in history into three sets: stories of the earliest time of the world, dealing with mythological events; stories dealing with historical, but no longer specifiable events; and those dealing with recent local history.¹⁵⁷ The earliest phase of the world was characterized by the fact that there was no difference in kind between people and animals; their characteristics were interchangeable. Animals not only had the power of speech, but they could by and large adopt any form or shape. Story tellers often refer to this epoch as the time when animals were people, prefacing their stories with remarks such as, "... we want to remember that when we talked about crows [Raven], in those days, they were men, not birds."¹⁵⁸ Many of the world's immutable (e.g., geographical and topographical) features came into existence during this time, but Gwich'in narrative does not contain a genesis story in the strict sense. Rather, the features are brought about through the transformative actions of certain culture heroes and tricksters. Raven, *deetrin'* (*deetrya'*, in the Gwichaa dialect) was of particular importance in this regard, but his actions affected physically pre-existing 'matter.'

Ch'iteehaakwaii is said to have altered those aspects of various animals' behavior which were dangerous to humans, while the actions of *Vatsangijik* (*Vasaagihdzak*, in the Gwichaa dialect) determined certain characteristics of animals' appearance and biological features.

	<i>Neets'aai</i>	<i>Gwichaa</i>	<i>Van Tat</i>	<i>Teet'it</i>	<i>Gwichyah</i>
<i>mythology:</i> 'when animals were like people'	Raven Wolverine [Sagithuk] [Jateaquoint]	Raven Wolverine Vasaagihdzak Ch'iteehaakwaii	Raven	Raven Wolverine Vatsangijik	Raven Wolverine
<i>historical fiction:</i> 'stories of the people'	Boy-in-the-Moon Kaihenjik	Boy-in-the-Moon K'aiiheenjik	Boy-in-the-Moon [Big Willow Man]	Boy-in-the-Moon Diniizhòk Kai Tenjik TTeeviiti Zheh Geet'it Kwan Ehdan Ats'an Vee Atachokai	Diniizhòk / Itrik Kwan Ehdan Ats'an Vee Atachuu Kai'
<i>recent history:</i> 'stories of local history'		V'iit Gwatral Goghwaii Tloh Tsal Olti' Dahjaki Shahnyaati	Tloh Tsal	Vigwatral Goghwaii Tloh Tsal	

Figure 7 Important Protagonists of Gwich'in Historical Narrative

Periodization after McGary (1985) and McKennan (1985)

There is no clearly defined break between the earliest era of the world and the subsequent epoch. The gradual transformations brought about by culture hero and trickster defined the relationship between human and animals as they have been known since. Animals lost the powers they possessed in the earliest period, and they are not actively involved in the incidents of the subsequent period. The stories are therefore not mythological, but neither are they historical in the strict sense of the term, since the events they describe occur at the bounds of remembered history; the image they convey, however, is of a place familiar, of a way of life quite similar to the world as it was in pre-contact times.¹⁵⁹ Eminent personages of this epoch of the world are powerful medicine men (Diniizhòk and Nideechi) and warriors (K'aiiheenjik, Nagai Tsal and Kwan Ehdan), the inept yet fearsome bushmen, *nana'in*, 'Grey Wings' (Ats'an Veh), and Boy-in-the-Moon, benefactor of the Teet'it Gwich'in.¹⁶⁰ Stories dating from this period of the world often explain the origin of customs and forms of behavior which defined Gwich'in culture in the pre-contact and early contact-traditional periods.

More clearly defined in their historical contents are the stories dealing with events of local history. They describe the personalities and deeds of people who lived some generations ago but can still be identified as the ancestral kin of people living today.¹⁶¹ The events described in these stories are fairly precisely located and often can be at least approximately dated. Factuality is often

demonstrated by tracing relationships of a story's protagonist to actual persons, living or known to have lived. The accounts of Vi'it Gwatral and Zheh Geetl'it referred to previously, as well as the stories of Tloh Ts'al, the first Gwich'in to encounter Europeans, and of the Teetl'it chief Visriiniintsaii Ti', who encountered John Bell on his first trip into Gwich'in country, at Road River in 1839, fall into this category.¹⁶² On the western side, the stories told at Fort Yukon about chief Shahnayaati', and about warriors Olti' and Goghwaii, instigators of a period of prolonged and violent warfare, are noteworthy for the richness of detail. The stories of Ditsii Deek'it and Honodol Onj at Fort McPherson, and of Atachuu Kaii', told at Arctic Red River and Fort McPherson, belong to the same set of narratives.

Lastly, a great many stories address specific moral or practical problems, or episodes of war. I have not made reference to these in Figure 7, but I will draw on them in the subsequent section where the relationship of the stories' signifying force to the 'mobility' and 'flexibility' of contact-traditional society will be considered.

4.3.3. *Topoi*

In a basic, formal sense, 'mobility' as a fundamental aspect of contact-traditional society was articulated in historical narrative at the level of 'deep' structure. Syntagmatic progressions are almost always worked through in terms of spatial transformations, paradigmatic transformations very frequently so. "Northern peoples' commitment to mobility ... must not be seen simply as a matter of economics. It goes to the very foundations of life, receiving expression in the beliefs and metaphors by which life itself is defined,"¹⁶³ as Brody aptly expresses it. This is also reflected in Gwich'in narrative.

The heroes of Gwich'in stories are forever travelling. Tensions which occur at points of crisis in a given story as well as changes in the plot are often mediated by spatially separating the parties. The warrior Atachuu Kaii' accidentally killed his brother, whereupon he left the band territory. He later killed one of his two wives, and subsequently moved into what is now Yukon Territory. Here he induced Otter not to prey on humans any longer. Having accomplished this deed, he departed for lands unknown and was never heard of again.¹⁶⁴ The culture hero Ch'itechaakwaii virtually travelled from adventure to adventure. The episodes of the narrative cycle are sequentially bounded by his movement from one place to the next; these movements became inscribed into the very geography of Gwich'in country. Wherever Ch'itechaakwaii spent a night, he left some peculiar landmark or phenomenon.¹⁶⁵

Spatial transformation as an aspect of the stories' underlying structure in some instances becomes itself a paradigmatic element of the plot, that is to say, it becomes an object of narrative consideration. The medicine power wielded by the famous eastern Gwich'in medicine person Diniizhòk enabled him to travel across the land faster than humanly possible. His medicine was dried caribou sinew, *edreechi*'. It shrank when put into the fire, causing a corresponding 'shrinkage' in the layout of the land which had to be traversed; a journey could thus be completed that

much faster. In a well-known incident, this power enabled Diniizhòk to travel to the camp of a distant group of Indians who were plotting to kill his brother. Using his travel medicine, he was able to reach the camp in time and foil the stratagem. The Indians had planned to kill his brother by asking him to play on the *akàii*, and to let him fall to his death. So skillful was Diniizhòk at this game that, still wearing his snowshoes, he jumped onto the blanket in place of his brother. It was impossible for the Indians to topple him off the blanket, try as they might. In a second contest, Diniizhòk challenged the Indians' best wrestler to a competition. In an inversion of customary proceedings, he used this ostensibly peaceful activity to kill his opponent. This so intimidated the Indians that Diniizhòk, his brother and his mother were allowed to depart unharmed.¹⁶⁶

Prowess in travelling was also a characteristic of the famous Van Tat or Dagoo chief Kwan Ehdan, the 'Man Without Fire.' Such was his fame that even an unsuccessful war campaign could not detract from his reputation. Having had to flee into Gwichaa territory after a defeat at the hands of the 'Mackenzie River people' led by Nagaii Tsal, he was challenged to a running race by the young men of the Gwichaa, and beat them easily.¹⁶⁷ A running race which occurred during the earliest period of the world can be viewed as a further extension of this narrative orientation. According to a story told among the Neets'ain, the respective habitats of ground and tree squirrel were allocated in accordance with the result of a running race to the top of a tree. Since that day, the winner, tree squirrel, has lived in the trees, while the loser has had to make do with living quarters down below.¹⁶⁸

Similar elements of signification can be established with regard to 'flexibility,' that is to say, with regard to the traditional emphasis on co-operation and sharing; and with regard to the inculcation of 'bush consciousness.' The need for co-operation and sharing is a *topos* dealt with frequently in the narratives. The story of 'Boy-in-the-Moon' is the quintessential expression of this concern.¹⁶⁹ The protagonist displayed great medicine power even as a very young boy. During a period of starvation, he employed his power to secure a large caribou kill for the group. The people, however, failed to reciprocate, refusing to allocate to him a proper share of the kill. This greatly embittered Boy-in-the-Moon, and he determined to leave the group to live on the moon. True to his co-operative ideals, however, he gave a song to the people before his departure, which they were to sing in times of starvation in order to secure his help.¹⁷⁰ This story has been told in a great number of variations, and the values it expresses were of great importance to the Peel River people. Even in the 1950s, according to Elizabeth Cass, the story still had a strong hold on the imagination of the people: "Many old Loucheux have said to me that this story really did happen; they are quite convinced that it is equally as important as our stories. In fact when I asked them one old Indian said he believed it just as much as he believed the stories told him by the priest."¹⁷¹ The importance attached to the story by the people of Fort McPherson was not lost on Anglican missionary Robert McDonald who lived at Fort McPherson almost 100 years before Cass; he appropriated the story into the frame of reference of his own beliefs: "Sounds like a bible story, eh?

That's why Archdeacon McDonald took it seriously. He thought the boy might be one of the prophets."¹⁷² According to Mrs. Stewart of Aklavik, the song which is sung on New Year's (see page 65) is derived from the very song handed down by Boy-in-the Moon.¹⁷³

Didactic examples emphasizing the positive virtues of co-operation and sharing can be found in a great many other stories. The distinctive treatment of this topos is immediately brought out in the progression of the plot, and I confine myself to elliptical summaries of the latter. During the earliest days of the world, Beaver and Muskrat co-operated in building a lodge; Beaver erected the structure and Muskrat furnished it. After the completion of the work, Muskrat gave his broad tail to Beaver as a token of appreciation; Beaver has worn it ever since.¹⁷⁴ One of the stories dealing with the culture hero Goghwai goes to some length describing his outstanding abilities as a hunter, but makes the point that during a period of severe starvation he almost perished, so that even he had to rely on other people's help and co-operation. Even the highly valued self-reliance derived from superior hunting skills must operate within a context of mutual help. The story concludes with the observation that "they [Goghwai and his brothers] would always travel together so they wouldn't get stuck again."¹⁷⁵

At the most immediate level of co-operation, the refusal to share food invokes immediate retribution, in a number of stories. In an uncharacteristic bout of spitefulness, the culture hero Vatsangijik refused to share his food with a large assemblage of birds who congregated at his camp during a period of starvation. With the help of two trees, however, the birds managed to distract Vatsangijik just long enough to be able to eat all of his food, and Vatsangijik was left empty-handed.¹⁷⁶ In a more serious variation on this topos, a woman was killed by her husband after the latter discovered that she had hoarded meat from a bear kill in order to avoid having to share it with him.¹⁷⁷ The connection between generosity and sharing, and the acquisition of symbolic capital is brought out in the story of the 'Generous Chief.' I pointed out in Chapter 3 that through sharing, economic capital could be converted into symbolic capital. A senior member of the group would usually distribute of a younger hunter's kill on the latter's behalf, praising his contribution to the group's welfare. The 'Generous Chief,' however, refused to do so, because he knew that the hunter in question, his own son, while providing a small amount of meat for distribution to the group, had kept back for his own use a significantly larger amount. The hunter relented only after repeated entreaties by his father, and gave a greater share of the food to the group. Only then did the father acknowledge his contribution. The story emphasizes the chief's concern for the welfare of the group, which is described in detail; this provides the contrastive element by which to measure the son's shortcoming, implicitly emphasizing to the listener the importance of sharing.¹⁷⁸

The elements of signification of Gwich'in narrative which articulate the various adjuncts of 'flexibility' characteristic of contact-traditional social organization, can be analyzed in much the same way. The various elements of 'bush consciousness,' that is to say, of the desired personal comportment, find expression in the narratives.

A number of stories exist which stress the importance of avoiding overt comparison of performance between people. The injunction to avoid this kind of interpersonal comparison is sometimes phrased as a description of the negative consequences of boasting. Paradigmatic in this regard is the story of K'aiiheenjik, which is among the most violent in the inventory of Gwich'in narratives. The story is remarkable for the ostensibly great discrepancy between cause, K'aiiheenjik's boasts concerning his strength, and effect, an extended cycle of violence and warfare, in the course of which the protagonist kills even his own sister. In this discrepancy resides the distinct signifying element of the story, the implicit adjuration to avoid untoward boasting and comparison. K'aiiheenjik was a man of extraordinary strength: "He was so large and powerful that his arms were as big as the body of an ordinary man."¹⁷⁹ His persistent boasting about his strength so angered a neighboring group that they decided to kill him. An extended cycle of attacks and counter-attacks ensued. K'aiiheenjik's brother was the first to be killed; in retaliation, K'aiiheenjik single-handedly slew all the members of the attacking group. K'aiiheenjik and his three nephews then embarked on a killing spree, slaying whoever they met on the trail. The four men finally took to the bush to hide from an even larger party setting out from the area of present-day Eagle (Alaska) in order to put an end to the killing. Among this party were two renowned young warriors who had trained for the coming foray by jumping across a fence put up outside their tent and by going on training runs, early in the morning. These two and the rest of their group were slain by K'aiiheenjik, and as one of the group's warriors was married to K'aiiheenjik's sister, he killed even her. The four then retreated to a hideout at the head of Sheenjik. Playing the hoop-and-pole game one day, however, his nephew's children let the willow globe which they threw into the river for the game, float away. It was discovered at the junction of the Porcupine and Yukon Rivers, indicating the approximate location of the hideout. A party which was dispatched upriver, killed K'aiiheenjik and his nephews in a prolonged fight.¹⁸⁰ One comes away from a reading of the different versions of this story with the feeling that old-time Gwich'in might have viewed K'aiiheenjik as a 'thoroughly irascible fellow,' representing the very antithesis of restrained public behavior which, as Mitchell observed, sometimes almost bordered on stoicism: "They are great stoics in general about concealing their emotions..."¹⁸¹

The topos of avoidance of too strong an emphasis on winning and losing, on competition, is more specifically exemplified through the story of Nagaii Tsal and Kwan Ehdan referred to previously, albeit in a less dramatic manner. Kwan Ehdan had been challenged to a running race by two young men of the Gwich'aa, who had been specifically trained for this event. The task of the race consisted of covering a certain distance as fast as possible, at the same time catching as many rabbits as possible. Although he set out considerably later than his two opponents, Kwan Ehdan beat them by a wide margin, "those two, all they saw was snow flying as Man Without Fire passed them."¹⁸² By the time the young runners returned to camp, Kwan Ehdan had already prepared and cooked a number of the rabbits he had caught. In order to leave no doubt as to who the winner of

the race was, but "with a humble voice,"¹⁸³ he gave to them some of the food. Visiting the two later on, he presented each of them with one of his best arrows in order to make up for this slight. Indicating that his involvement in this contest was not altogether of his own choosing, he admonished them, "Here, take this and keep it for your weapon, my grandson I am an old man now. Why did you try this on me, that I had to bring this shame on you?"¹⁸⁴

The story of the swan and the teal, lastly, is a permutation of the same topos, but constitutes a 'mirror image' of its treatment in the preceding example. In the latter, the young men challenged Kwan Ehdan's on the basis of his proven accomplishments. In this story, the ridicule of the apparently stronger competitor directed at the seemingly inferior opponent in a wrestling competition turns out to be motivated by a misguided evaluation of prospective chances based on appearances. The story describes a "big wrestling match between every kind of duck."¹⁸⁵ The swan, being a tall and powerful exemplar of the species, beat out every opponent. There remained a single adversary, the teal (a mallard-like, quite diminutive bird). Needless to say, the teal—"about the fanciest duck,"¹⁸⁶ as the story teller explains it—the smallest in the challenging order, threw the big swan three times and won the contest. The story derives its meaning from two contrastive elements. One, from the great difference in the participants' physical characteristics; two, and correlatively, from the fact that the presumably weakest opponent is last in the circular challenging order, whereas usually the weakest would be one of the first to be eliminated. The teal entered the competition at the point where his opponents were of the highest calibre, but he was successful even though the competition had reached its most difficult stage.

5. Summary

The contact-traditional games were defined, in the first instance, in their relation to the economic field. The high degree of mobility characterizing the latter was reflected by a predominance of games whose technical outcome determinants were functionally homologous to many tasks of subsistence production. The strong emphasis on the display of physical skills was mediated by the flexibility of contact-traditional social arrangement, expressed at the level of individual dispositions as the tendency of 'bush consciousness' to avoid overt individual comparison in any domain of social practice, including the field of games. Power relations, by contrast, were reproduced through games which were employed as medicine devices, but here, as well, the reproduction of relations of authority was mediated by the overall cooperative context determining the occasion.

The dispositions of 'bush consciousness' were inculcated through early childhood education, in the context of familial socialization. Learning based on observation and imitation was largely self-initiated and often self-directed, and, corresponding to the lack of structures of coercive authority in the general social space, educational methods were characterized by a marked degree of permissiveness, that is to say, non-intervention; self-reliance, understood as a corollary of non-intervention, was implicit in these learning methods. It is noteworthy that imitative, self-initiated learning

constituted an implicit, yet active, acceptance of the locus of educational authority, the parental 'role model' whose activities were imitated. Games which played an important role in these processes, reflected the mobility of contact-traditional culture in their distinct emphasis on activities involving physical skill and endurance. Narrative practice, encompassing the totality of Gwich'in historical, lastly, played an important role in the inculcation of the principles of the symbolic construction of the social world, and thus in the production of a sense of cultural identity

Endnotes

- 1 William L. Hardisty, "Loucheux Indians," p. 311.
- 2 Robert McKennan, *Chandalar Kutchin*, p. 48.
- 3 HSFC, *passim*; R. Gerald Glassford, *Transitional Eskimo Culture*, *passim*; François Gravelle, "Les jeux traditionnels Déné;" *idem*, Traditional Games of the Dogrib and Slavey Indians. See also, François Gravelle, Terry Orlick, Harvey Scott & Bernard Booth, Comparison of Games among the Dogrib and Slavey Indians; François Gravelle & Bernard Booth, "Comparisons of Games among the Dogrib and Slavey Indians of Great Slave Lake."
- 4 In following Bourdieu's theorem of the 'tendential dominance of the economic field,' this analytic strategy accords high priority to the ecological conditions of existence affecting the field of games.
- 5 The interlinear translation of the Gwich'in term reads, 'they skim (spear) on snow.' The term 'snowsnake' was coined by Stewart Culin; it is widely used in traditional games documentations (see his, *Games of the North American Indians*, p. 399ff.).
- 6 It would be more correct to state, '... hunters carrying back to camp some of the proceeds'—the greater part of the meat had to be hauled back to camp by the women (see, William L. Hardisty, "Loucheux Indians," p. 312), yet only men played the game. See also, Strachan Jones, "Kutchin Tribes," p. 325.
- 7 PAC, MG19/D12, Journal of Daily Occurrences, 29 January 1849.
- 8 See, June Helm & Nancy L. Oestreich, *The Dogrib Hand Game*, for a detailed description.
- 9 Sheppard Krech, "On the Aboriginal Population of the Kutchin," p. 54. Krech argues that the scarcity of existence in contact-traditional Gwich'in culture as indicated by the degree of mortality ostensibly occurring as a result of starvation was probably not as pronounced as is often stated. Such an impression may have been created by the effects of periodic epidemics exacerbating the actual effects of starvation. "a starvation theme may have been predisposed by epidemic disease" ("Disease, Starvation and Northern Athapaskan Social Organization," p. 718).
- 10 William Hardisty, "Loucheux Indians," p. 312.
- 11 PAC, MG19/D12, Journal of Daily Occurrences, 1 December 1850.
- 12 YTA, 85/97/F192, Robert McDonald, Journals, 30 October 1899. Nelson's Fishery is located downriver from Fort McPherson.
- 13 YTA, 81/50-3/RMF7, Andrew J. Stone, Diaries, n.d. The same emphasis is implied by the following statement which Arctic explorer Michael Mason claims to have been made by an "ancient Indian" in the Upper Porcupine country: "In the old days we used to hunt with the bow and spear. Our young men were strong in those days. We hunted the moose by running him down on snowshoes, and we could run all day, like wolves. Now our young men are become lazy and feeble. They prefer to hunt the moose in the fall when he is easy to kill. They ride on their dog-sleds and are afraid to run all day" (*The Arctic Forests*, p. 24).
- 14 GSA, M71/5/1A1, Stringer to friends, 2 July 1893.
- 15 GSA, M56/2/C21, Thomas Canham, Account of the Indians and Their Life in the North, p. 3.
- 16 Angus Graham, *The Golden Grindstone*, pp. 184-185; Chief Francis' group were heading north out of 'Wind City.' It should be pointed out that the book also contains a great deal of otiose nonsense (see George Mitchell's characterization by his contemporary, Eben McAdam, in: *From Duck Lake to Dawson City*). On the relationship between Chief Francis and Mitchell, see also the short note by Susan Beaumont, "The Chiefs of Fort McPherson."
- 17 GLCI, Elizabeth Cass, Some Observations, p. 1/2.
- 18 GLCI, Elizabeth Cass, Some Observations, p. 1/6. I will make repeated reference to Mitchell's and Stone's accounts in the short section which follows, because they provide a useful contrastive referent by which to reconstruct the distinctly different evaluation traditionally evident in Gwich'in society in respect of such mastery. The argument is designed to provide a first clarification of aspects of cooperation and competition as they were determined by distributional properties extant at the point of articulation of the fields of games and of subsistence production, the latter determined by mobility as the 'structuring structure.' For a discussion of different modes of referentiality invoked by mobility, and in particular by running, in contemporary culture, see, Alan Aycock, *Stress Fractures*. Bourdieu and the Postmodern Runner.
- 19 YTA, 81/50-3/RMF7, Andrew J. Stone, Diaries, n.d., emphasis added.
- 20 "What would become of the literary world if one began to argue, not about the value of this or that author's style, but about the value of arguments about style?" (Pierre Bourdieu, *Language & Symbolic Power*, p. 58).
- 21 GLCC, OT114/NG9, William Nerysoo, Traditional Gwich'in Games.

- 22 HSFC, Lazarus Sittichinli, Traditional Gwich'in Culture.
- 23 I found one exception to this statement in, *A Long Time Ago. A Life Story of Mr. Christopher Colin* (CGLP, L32/1-5), where Christopher Colin painstakingly tallies his success as a hunter—he estimates that he killed 108 moose in the course of his life. The context of his discussion, however, is provided by his regret over the loss of these skills in the subsequent generation. In a similar vein, the late John Vaneltsi once told me about a hunting trip on which, so he said, he killed three moose with one bullet.
- 24 HSFC, Andrew Kunnizzi, Loucheux Games.
- 25 HSFC, Andrew Kunnizzi, Loucheux Games. The contest between the hunter and his quarry could turn into a lengthy affair. Endurance was therefore more highly valued than raw speed, as an adjunct of physical competency. The point is implicitly expressed by the following observation: "Eskimo run pretty fast for short distances, but Indians can run long (not too fast)" (ibid.).
- 26 CGLP, L43/-, Andrew Kunnizzi, *Travels in the Yukon*, emphasis added.
- 27 CGLP, L43/-, Andrew Kunnizzi, *Travels in the Yukon When Young*, emphasis added.
- 28 Before he broke his knee cap, that is. After that incident, and much to their dismay, some young men chosen by chief Francis had to haul Mitchell along in a toboggan.
- 29 Angus Graham, *Golden Grindstone*, p. 248.
- 30 Angus Graham, *Golden Grindstone*, p. 250.
- 31 Robert McKennan, *Chandalar Kutchin*, p. 84.
- 32 Richard Slobodin, *Band Organization*, p. 18.
- 33 William Hardisty, "Loucheux Indians," p. 317; see also, Sergei Kan, *Symbolic Immortality*.
- 34 Strachan Jones, "Kutchin Tribes," p. 326.
- 35 William Hardisty, "Loucheux Indians," p. 318.
- 36 HSFC, Sarah Simon, Traditional Loucheux Games, William Hardisty, "Loucheux Indians," pp. 317-318.
- 37 PAC, MG19/D12, Journal of Daily Occurrences, 11 January 1849.
- 38 CGLP, L27/15-16, Sarah Peters, *The Way the People Used to Live*.
- 39 The Gwich'in began to use dog teams only after the arrival of Hudson's Bay Company traders.
- 40 CGLP, L46/1, Bella Alexie, *Early 1900s as I Remember I*, p. 9. A description of Gwich'in swing will be found in Appendix 1, page 271.
- 41 CGLP, L44/13, Johnny Kaye, *From Fall to Spring*, p. 1.
- 42 Cornelius Osgood, *Ethnography of the Kutchin*, p. 28.
- 43 Feasting could be an extensive, and expensive, affair, much to the dismay of one of the earliest observers of Gwich'in society: "When several families become congregated," Augustus Peers noted in his private journal, "instead of one providing for its own wants the days are spent in giving feasts. Is it the duty of each camp to entertain each family of the band in turn. ... let the animals be ever so numerous they will not think of providing for their forts until about the time they think of visiting the white man ..." (Augustus Peers, Journal 1842-1852, pp. 252-253).
- 44 Cornelius Osgood, *Ethnography of the Kutchin*, p. 98; see also, CGLP, L44/5, Johnny Kaye, *The Fearless Group*. The bouncing game in question is *akàii*, the Gwich'in blanket toss.
- 45 CGLP, L44/13, Johnny Kay, *From Fall to Spring*.
- 46 CGLP, L10/2, Christie Thompson, *Life Up the River*.
- 47 GLCC, OT16, Annie B. Robert, Songs and Blanket Toss.
- 48 Émile Petitot, "Étude sur la nation Montagnaise," p. 545.
- 49 See, René Lamothe, Notes and Descriptions.
- 50 GLCC, OT112/NG2, Andrew Kunnizzi, [Traditional Games]; GLCC, OT16, Annie B. Robert, Songs and Blanket Toss; GLCC, OT37, Annie G. Robert, Traditional Games.
- 51 William Hardisty, "Loucheux Indians," p. 313.
- 52 A graphic description of this effect is given by Robert Kennicott who passed the winter of 1861-62 at LaPierre House ("Journal of Robert Kennicott," pp. 129-131).
- 53 GLCC, OT28, Mary Francis, Story about Akàii.
- 54 Sarah Simon, MVPI, *Transcripts of Proceedings at Community Hearings*, vol. 31, p. 1156.

- 55 Sarah Simon, MVPL, *Transcripts of Proceedings at Community Hearings*, vol. 31, p. 1156.
- 56 HSFC, Lazarus Sittichinli, Traditional Gwich'in Culture.
- 57 GLCC, OT20, Annie B. Robert, *Stories of Long Ago and Present: Games and Medicine*.
- 58 GLCC, Elizabeth Cass, *Some Observations*, p. 7. This point is also made by Mrs. Sarah Simon (GLCC, OT-, *The Legend of the Boy in the Moon*).
- 59 GLCC, OT20, Annie B. Robert, *Stories of Long Ago and Present: Games and Medicine*.
- 60 GLCC, OT37, Annie G. Robert, *Traditional Games*.
- 61 GLCC, Elizabeth Cass, *Some Observations*, pp. 3/3-4; HSFC, Lazarus Sittichinli, *Traditional Gwich'in Culture*. This theme is also worked out in the story of Diniizhòk, a mythological figure and medicine person known to have been an *akdii* player of the highest calibre.
- 62 Harvey Scott, personal communication. The incident also speaks to the resiliency of medicine power's signifying force.
- 63 See, Michael Heine, Harvey Scott & Valerie Kennedy, *Elements of Symbolic Classification*.
- 64 Cornelius Osgood, *Ethnography of the Kutchin*, p. 96; Michael Mason, *The Arctic Forests*, pp. 23, 70.
- 65 William Hardisty, "Loucheux Indians," pp. 312-313.
- 66 HSFC, Lazarus Sittichinli, *Traditional Gwich'in Culture*.
- 67 HSFC, Lazarus Sittichinli, *Traditional Gwich'in Culture*.
- 68 The only principle of order evident was a distinction based on gender. The women wrestled separately, but the procedure was the same (William Hardisty, "Loucheux Indians," p. 313).
- 69 HSFC, Lazarus Sittichinli, *Traditional Gwich'in Culture*.
- 70 HSFC, Lazarus Sittichinli, *Traditional Gwich'in Culture*.
- 71 CGLP, L4/10, Lucy Vaneltsi, *Traditional Life*, #2.
- 72 HSFC, Jim Sittichinli, *Traditional Kutchin Games*; GLCC, OT37, Annie G. Robert, *Traditional Games*; GLCC, OT—, William Nerysoo, *Games*; CGLP, L27/15-16, Sarah Peters, *The Way the People Used to Live*; GLCC, OT7, Annie G. Robert, *Old-Time Stories*; HSFC, Lazarus Sittichinli, *Traditional Gwich'in Culture*; HSFC, Sarah Simon, *Traditional Loucheux Games*.
- 73 Cornelius Osgood, *Ethnography of the Kutchin*, p. 96.
- 74 GLCC, OT20, Annie B. Robert, *Stories of Long Ago and Present: Games and Medicine*.
- 75 HSFC, Jim Sittichinli, *Traditional Kutchin Games*.
- 76 See R. Gerald Glassford, *Transitional Eskimo Culture*.
- 77 HBCA, B240/a/2, Fort Yukon Post Journal, 26 December 1848. When discussing *nehkak cho* with an old-timer at Tsiigehtchic, the gentleman took his sock off and showed me the effects of a somewhat similar injury he sustained while playing Gwich'in football as a young boy: "It was wild and rough. We played all day, till we were totally exhausted."
- 78 HSFC, Jim Sittichinli, *Traditional Kutchin Games*; HSFC, Andrew Kunnizzi, *Loucheux Games*; HSFC, Lazarus Sittichinli, *Traditional Gwich'in Culture*. Football developed into a relatively important tool for the mediation of tensions developing between Gwich'in and Inuit assembling for the annual summer trade meets at Fort McPherson and Arctic Red River. This development is considered in the subsequent chapter.
- 79 Robert McKennan, *Chandalar Kutchin*, p. 59; Cornelius Osgood, *Ethnography of the Kutchin*, p. 106.
- 80 CGLP, L45/-, Andrew Kunnizzi, *Travels in the Yukon*.
- 81 CGLP, L7/1-2, Julian André, *Life Story*; CGLP, L10/2, Christie Thompson, *Life Up the River*; CGLP, L52/16, Jim Koe, *A Long Time Ago*, #1.
- 82 Sheppard Krech, "Interethnic Relations in the Lower Mackenzie River Region," *passim*.
- 83 Richard Slobodin, "Eastern Kutchin Warfare," p. 79.
- 84 Cornelius Osgood, *Ethnography of the Kutchin*, p. 86.
- 85 HBCA, B240/a/1, Fort Yukon Post Journal, 29 October 1847.
- 86 HBCA, B240/a/1, Fort Yukon Post Journal, 1 November 1847.
- 87 HBCA, B240/a/1, Fort Yukon Post Journal, 15 November 1847.

- 88 HBCA, B240/a/1, Fort Yukon Post Journal, 7 August 1847; Alexander H. Murray, *Journal of the Yukon*, pp. 51, 56-57; HBCA, B240/a/1, Fort Yukon Post Journal, 14 March 1848; YTA, MS85/97, Robert McDonald, Journals, 29 June 1864, 24 January 1866.
- 89 GSA, M74/2/C24, Joe Hodgson, Memorandum, 24 March 1934; GSA, M74/2/C24, Hodgson to Bishop Stringer, 1934; YTA, MS85/97, Robert McDonald, Journals, 19 September 1870, 19 October 1870.
- 90 See, Susan Ugarenko, Distribution of the Kutchin.
- 91 John Franklin, *Narrative of a Second Expedition*, p. 177 ff.
- 92 YTA, MS 87/34, Don Ross Collection, Murray to Ross, 2 June 1847. The commencement of building activities caused a similar reaction among the Dagoo and Van Tat connected to La Pierre House (HBCA, B/240/a/1, Fort Yukon Post Journal, 27 June 1847). A group of Han arrived at the end of June to vent their displeasure at the establishment of the new trading post (*Journal of the Yukon*, p. 51).
- 93 Alexander H. Murray, *Journal of the Yukon*, p. 32.
- 94 HBCA, B240/a/1, Fort Yukon Post Journal, 28 June 1847.
- 95 HBCA, B240/a/1, Fort Yukon Post Journal, 28 June 1847.
- 96 "There was no noise or singing as with the others" (Alexander Murray, *Journal of the Yukon*, p.60). The Han arriving in this group saw in the establishment of the Fort the cause of the death of one of their chiefs. When Murray presented each of the them with the gift of a small piece of tobacco, "they started off at full race all in a body to the lower end of the encampment and back again to their landing place, shouting and whooping in a peculiar manner; they immediately formed into a half circle and danced with great vigour for a few minutes, keeping time with their outlandish songs..." (ibid.).
- 97 HBCA, B240/a/1, Fort Yukon Post Journal, 28 June 1847.
- 98 On the history of Gwich'in dancing, see, Craig Mishler, *The Crooked Stovepipe*; see also his, Gwich'in Athapaskan Music and Dance.
- 99 "They are great talkers and very fond of displaying their eloquence. They are always making public harangues, and in the figurative language they use, their speeches are not ineloquent nor void of sense" (William Hardisty, "Louch-eux Indians," p. 311).
- 100 Alexander Murray, *Journal of the Yukon*, p. 48.
- 101 HBCA, B240/a/1, Fort Yukon Post Journal, 28 June 1847.
- 102 More correctly, they arrived at the site of the future Fort. Construction had commenced, but Murray and his party were still living in tents.
- 103 Alexander Murray, *Journal of the Yukon*, pp. 57-58.
- 104 YTA, MS 85/97, Robert McDonald, Journals, 2 July 1863.
- 105 François Mercier, *Recollections*, p. 54; see also, Ethel Stewart, "Sa-heu-ti, Chief of the Yukon Gwich'in."
- 106 GMA, M878/9, Alexander Murray to James, 20 May 1849.
- 107 François Mercier, *Recollections*, p. 54.
- 108 François Mercier, *Recollections*, pp. 54-56.
- 109 Richard Slobodin, "Without Fire: A Kutchin Tale of Warfare, Survival and Vengeance."
- 110 The versions of the story told by Ronnie Pascal and Sarah Peters seem to indicate rather that only Van Tat, Dagoo, and Gwichaa took part in the proceedings.
- 111 CGLP, L49/2, Sarah Peters, *Vigwahrtrel*.
- 112 CGLP, L49/2, Sarah Peters, *Vigwahrtrel*.
- 113 CGLP, L13/-, Ronny Pascal, *Story of Zheh Geetliit*.
- 114 HBCA, B240/a/2, Fort Yukon Post Journal, 17 November 1847.
- 115 HBCA, B240/a/2, Fort Yukon Post Journal, 19 November 1847. 'Alexander Mackenzie' is not to be confused with the explorer of the same name.
- 116 HBCA, B240/a/2, Fort Yukon Post Journal, 24 November 1847; Murray still made reference to this feast some three months later (GMA, M941/file 18, Alexander Murray to McPherson, 23 February 1849). Unfortunately, I have not been able to find a description of this feast in the documents in the Hudson's Bay Company Archives.
- 117 Strachan Jones, "Kutchin Tribes," p. 326.
- 118 CGLP, L28/-, Mary Husky, *Life of Long Ago*.

- 119 Robert McKennan, *Chandalar Kutchin*, p. 52.
- 120 Richard Slobodin, *Band Organization*, pp. 43-44.
- 121 GLCC, Elizabeth Cass, Some Observations, p. 1/12.
- 122 Robert McKennan, *Chandalar Kutchin*, p. 48; GLCC, Elizabeth Cass, Some Observations, p. 1/12; CGLP, L41/1, Johnny Semple, *Traditional Life*, #1.
- 123 GLCC, Elizabeth Cass, Some Observations, p. 1/12. It is not possible to corroborate this particular statement, but the subsequent passage indicates that drinking too much water while travelling on the trail in winter was a serious concern.
- 124 Robert McKennan, *Chandalar Kutchin*, p. 52.
- 125 Cornelius Osgood, *Ethnography of the Kutchin*, p. 30.
- 126 CGLP, L49/3, Roddy Peters, *How People of Fort McPherson Hunted*.
- 127 I was not able to obtain the Gwich'in name for this game.
- 128 Cornelius Osgood, *Ethnography of the Kutchin*, p. 96.
- 129 GLCC, OT112/NG2, Andrew Kunnizzi, [Traditional Gwich'in Games]; see idem, HSFC, Loucheux Games.
- 130 McKennan gives the term *zundiluk* for the Neets'aii. According to Mishler, this game evolved into a contact-traditional dance exclusive to the Neets'aii, viz., the 'Mountain rope' (*Neets'ee Tlyaa*), but he is not entirely clear about the connection (Craig Mishler, *Crooked Stovepipe*, p. 75).
- 131 GLCC, OT113/NG3, Annie B. Robert, Caribou Eyes and Handkerchief Game.
- 132 HSFC, Sarah Simon to Nellie Cournoyea, 10 May 1973; GLCC, OT113/NG3, Annie B. Robert, Caribou Eyes and Handkerchief Game; HSFC, Lazarus Sittichinli, Traditional Gwich'in Culture.
- 133 Mrs. Simon's description appears to indicate that this variation of the game was played by girls (HSFC, Sarah Simon to Nellie Cournoyea, 10 May 1973).
- 134 GLCC, OT113/NG3, Annie B. Roberts, Caribou Eyes and Handkerchief Game. The same cooperative orientation was also implicit in 'playing house,' *k'agwitsal*, a major element of which was often a feast, for which each of the children had to contribute some food (see, CGLP, L48/5, George Vittrekwa, *Games Children Played*; GLCC, OT20, Annie B. Roberts, Stories of Long Ago and Present; HSFC, Martha Stewart, Traditional Gwich'in Games).
- 135 GLCC, OT20, Annie B. Roberts, Stories of Long Ago and Present.
- 136 As was noted above, the significant domain of valorization for these skills was subsistence production itself. This was well understood by the boys, because their first hunting success, i.e., killing a moose or caribou, was marked by a feast given by the parents (see, for example, Robert McDonald, Journals, 3 June 1903: "Edward Sittichinli made a feast in honour of his son Lazarus, about 12 years of age, having killed a moose this spring" (YTA, MS 85/97).
- 137 Pierre Bourdieu & Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction*, p. 29.
- 138 Robert McKennan, *Chandalar Kutchin*, p. 52.
- 139 Michael Mason, *Arctic Forests*, pp. 67-68; see also, Strachan Jones, "Kutchin Tribes," p. 326.
- 140 Angus Graham, *Golden Grindstone*, p. 259; see also, e.g., GLCC, OT110/NG1, Bella Alexie, Traditional Gwich'in Games; GLCC, OT20, Annie B. Robert, Stories of Long Ago and Present: Games and Medicine.
- 141 Angus Graham, *Golden Grindstone*, p. 243.
- 142 CGLP, L32/1, Christopher Colin, *A Long Time Ago*, #1.
- 143 Angus Graham, *Golden Grindstone*, p. 242, emphasis added. See also the childhood reminiscences of Teet'it elders who grew up in the bush, e.g., GLCC, OT20, Annie B. Robert, Stories of Long Ago and Present; GLCC, OT110/NG1, Bella Alexie, Traditional Gwich'in Games; GLCC, OT112/NG2, Andrew Kunnizzi, [Traditional Gwich'in Games].
- 144 Angus Graham, *Golden Grindstone*, p. 242.
- 145 Angus Graham, *Golden Grindstone*, p. 242.
- 146 Mary Jane McGary, Gwich'in Gwandak, p. 50.
- 147 Angus Graham, *Golden Grindstone*, pp. 242-243.
- 148 George Vittrekwa remembers of his childhood that his parents would repeat the old-time stories on numerous occasions, "they say it over and over again, the same story sometimes, and while they are telling me stories, I look at them both, and they let me know that story. So many times just I know the story real good, right up to now" (CGLP, L48/5, Games Children Played). See, Craig Mishler, "'He Said, They Say'," for a discussion of aspects of rhetorical style involved.

- 149 CGLP, L39/1, Neil McDonald, *Christmas Long Ago*.
- 150 Mary Jane McGary, Gwich'in Gwandak, p. 49.
- 151 GLCC, OT-, Sarah Simon, *Legend of the Boy in the Moon*.
- 152 Cornelius Osgood, *Ethnography of the Kutchin*, p. 95.
- 153 Robert Kennicott, "Journal," p. 85.
- 154 Robert McKennan, *Chandalar Kutchin*, p. 50. Compare also the following observation made by Petitot: "In a lodge where, on either side, feelings had been running high, a Catholic Loucheux sprang to his feet and said: 'Well, my brethren, since we cannot get along, let's agree on this: that those among us who will have prayed longest and with most fervour will thereby have proved that theirs is the better religion.' Catholics and Protestants concurred in that singular proposal. It is said that the Protestants' catalogue of orisons was very soon exhausted, and they were first to give up; as for the Catholic Loucheux, on the contrary, they went on for half a day saying their beads. After which they stood up and exclaimed triumphantly: 'You have just proved that your religion is no good ... The Protestants admitted their defeat ...' (Émile Petitot, Letter from Good Hope, 30.5.1870, *Missions des Oblates*, 3 (1873); quoted in: Donat Savoie (ed.), *Amerindians of the Canadian Northwest*, p. 119).
- 155 Angus Graham, *Golden Grindstone*, pp. 247-248. See also Mary Jane McGary, Gwich'in Gwandak, p. 51. At Fort McPherson, I was present on several occasions when Neil Colin told old-time stories as well as biographical anecdotes. He is appreciated as a story teller able to bring out the humorous aspects of traditional lore as well as a person knowledgeable in Gwich'in history.
- 156 Mary Jane McGary, Gwich'in Gwandak, p. 51.
- 157 This schema is taken from McGary's detailed work (Gwich'in Gwandak, *passim*).
- 158 CGLP, L8/7, Lucy Rat, *Crow Story*.
- 159 Mary Jane McGary, Gwich'in Gwandak, p. 533.
- 160 By virtue of the precision of geographical description, a version of the Diniizhòk story told by Hyacinthe Andre at Arctic Red River, can almost be placed into the category, stories of local history (see his "Diniizhòk Story").
- 161 See, Mary Jane McGary, Gwich'in Gwandak, p. 673.
- 162 According to Slobodin, this encounter occurred at 'Bubbling Up' (Richard Slobodin, *Band Organization*, p. 17).
- 163 Hugh Brody, *Living Arctic*, p. 103.
- 164 CGLP, L27/9-10, Sarah Peters, *Attachokai*.
- 165 Robert McKennan, *Chandalar Kutchin*, p. 121; see also, Mary Jane McGary, Gwich'in Gwandak, pp. 385-416.
- 166 CGLP, L27/3-4, Sarah Peters, *Story of a Man Called Daniizhok*; Hyacinthe Andre, "Diniizhòk Story;" CGLP, L21/7, Paul Bonnetplume, *Diniijik the Medicine Man*.
- 167 CGLP, L44/2, Johnny Kaye, *Nigaii Tsai and Kwan Ehdan*; CGLP, L33/8, Edward Snowshoe, *Man Without Fire*, #4; Cornelius Osgood, *Ethnography of the Kutchin*.
- 168 Robert McKennan, *Chandalar Kutchin*, p. 130.
- 169 Petitot renders the Gwich'in name as 'siè-zjiédhidié,' but I have not been able to find corroboration for this (Émile Petitot, *The Amerindians*, p. 184.).
- 170 CGLP, L41/5, Johnny Semple, *Story of the Boy in the Moon*; GLCC, OT97, Johnny Semple, Gwich'in History and Stories; Roddy Peters, "The Martin Skin Coverall Man," *Peel River Press*, 15 September 1970; Robert McKennan, *Chandalar Kutchin*, pp. 146-147; Charles Keim, "Kutchin Legends," pp. 102-103; Marius Barbeau, "Loucheux Myths," pp. 254-155.
- 171 GLCC, Elizabeth Cass, *Some Observations*, p. 7.
- 172 GLCC, OT/-, Sarah Simon, *The Legend of the Man in the Moon*. The same point is made by Mrs. Catherine Mitchell in her, *Life History* (GLCC, OT61).
- 173 GLCC, Elizabeth Cass, *Some Observations*, p. 7.
- 174 Robert McKennan, *Chandalar Kutchin*, p. 127.
- 175 CGLP, L27/1, Sarah Peters, *Story of Goghwai*.
- 176 CGLP, L27/2, Sarah Peters, *Story of a Man Called Vatsangijik*.
- 177 CGLP, L23/1-2, Edward Nazon, *Legend of the Ungrateful Old Woman*.
- 178 CGLP, L11/3-4, William Nerysoo, *The Generous Chief*.
- 179 Robert McKennan, *Chandalar Kutchin*, p. 148.

- 180 Moses Peter in, Mary Jane McGary, Gwich'in Gwandak, pp. 554-575; CGLP, L13/3, Ronnie Pascal, Story of *Kai Tenjik*; CGLP, L21/1-2, Paul Bonnetplume, *Big Willow Medicine Man*; Roddy Peters, "The Big Willow Man," *Peel River Press*, October 1970; Robert McKennan, *Chandalar Kutchin*, pp. 148-152.
- 181 Angus Graham, *Golden Grindstone*, p. 239.
- 182 CGLP, L33/8, Edward Snowshoe, *Man Without Fire*, #4.
- 183 CGLP, L33/8, Edward Snowshoe, *Man Without Fire*, #4.
- 184 CGLP, L33/8, Edward Snowshoe, *Man Without Fire*, #4; by addressing them as his 'grandsons,' he deliberately stressed his position of generational seniority and authority. See also, CGLP, L8/3, Lucy Rat, *Man Without Fire*; CGLP, L20/13-14, Pascal Baptiste, *Man Without Fire*; CGLP, L44/2, Johnny Kaye, *Nigai Tsal and Kwan Ehdan*; CGLP, L22/1-3, Eliza Andre, *A Long Time Ago: Kyan-Eh-Dun [Kwan Ehdan] and Nah-Ghang-Tsul [Nagai Tsal]*.
- 185 Charles Keim, "Kutchin Legends," p. 100.
- 186 Charles Keim, "Kutchin Legends," p. 100.

CHAPTER 5

MISSION AND TRADING POST

*... so must they ever follow the prey wherever
it may lead them, and the missionary must fol-
low them through the tangled woods ...*

— Charlotte Bompas, 1888

*... there are now many collected at the Fort &
the noise they make is worse than Bedlam.*

— Augustus Peers, 25 May 1850

John Bell established Fort McPherson on the bank of the Peel River in 1840. By that time, Gwich'in had already been in direct and indirect contact with the fur trade for the better part of five decades. In the south-east, Fort Good Hope, established in 1804, and relocated twice, in 1823 and 1826, had drawn Arctic Red River people to the fur trade on a regular basis. On the western side of Gwich'in country, Russian merchants traded into the territory via the Pacific and Arctic coastal people, and the groups along the lower Yukon River. Fort Yukon, on the western side of the territory, was established in 1847 to compete with the Russian traders for the fur resources of that area. La Pierre House was established on the upper reaches of the Bell River as a supply post for Fort Yukon, in that same year.¹

The effects of these new posts on Gwich'in society during the three decades after the establishment of the posts were relatively minor, but the groundwork was laid for many of the significant changes which occurred in the subsequent period. Immediately noticeable was a change in the symbolic economy, indicated by an increased consumption of beads which constituted a particular form of both economic and symbolic capital. Further, certain technical aspects of the field of subsistence production changed, as well as the annual pattern of "visitations"² to the trading posts. This latter change, as will be discussed below, had ramifications for the field of games. In general, however, the characteristics of 'flexibility' and 'mobility' which circumscribed the position of the field of games in the contact-traditional social space remained by and large unaffected.

This was in the main due to the fact that changes in the structure of production within the economic field during this period were comparatively insignificant and contained; the main items sought by Gwich'in during this period, beads, rifles, and tobacco, were acquired through the meat

supply trade as much as through commercial trapping. Beads replaced abalone shells and dyed porcupine quills as a symbolic medium for the expression of wealth and rank, soon after the arrival of the fur traders,³ but this did not alter the basic structures of production of the subsistence economy proper. While guns, i.e., muzzle loaders, were an item in steady demand, they were often obtained as an indicator of prestige rather than for their practical utility which was doubtful at best. Thus Gwich'in were often quite eager to exchange their rifles for beads when the opportunity arose, "even at the beginning of winter when a gun is of the first importance to them they will swap with one another of its equivalent in these baubles."⁴

If not the demand for rifles, then the demand for beads and tobacco slowly led to the development of a cycle of regular summer visits to the posts, which the Gwich'in integrated into their annual movements. To judge by the available documents, this development was initially more pronounced among the groups trading into Fort Yukon than those trading into Fort McPherson. For a time, Fort Yukon remained the more important fur trading post, while at Fort McPherson the meat supply trade had a higher priority. The latter activity could more easily be integrated into the existing annual subsistence cycle, but was less regularized; Teet'it Gwich'in hunters would travel to the Fort in order to trade moose and caribou meat whenever their own supply, and their needs and inclination, made this possible. To the dismay of trader Peers at Fort McPherson, who was heavily dependent upon these supplies, Gwich'in hunters never appeared to come often enough, the efforts of Vandeh, the Fort hunter, notwithstanding.⁵ By and large, contact of Gwich'in with the posts was thus limited to short annual visits usually occurring in early and mid-summer.⁶

The necessarily individualistic orientation of the commercial trapping economy thus did not affect the communal nature of Peel River Gwich'in social life until some time later. Steel traps and the trapping methods required by this new device, were not familiar to the Gwich'in, and the traditional snares and deadfalls were low in productivity. Chief Factor Anderson noted that prior to his arrival in the area, "hardly any Indians had a trap ... they were consequently ... quite unacquainted with the art of trapping foxes."⁷ 500 steel traps had been manufactured by 1857, and "the Indians, tho' still imperfect are beginning to catch foxes."⁸ Several more decades were to pass, however, before trapping among the Teet'it developed into a solitary activity which significantly affected the communal orientation of social life.

The slow development of new trapping methods led to the gradual introduction into the Gwich'in economy of dog teams as a means of winter transport. The few dogs which had traditionally been owned by Gwich'in were used as pack dogs; dog team travel had been unknown.⁹ During the first decades of the trade, Gwich'in would often come to the Forts to borrow the sleighs, i.e., teams, in order to pick up the meat and transport it to the Fort.¹⁰ Dog teams became an integral part of Gwich'in contact-traditional only several decades after the fur traders' arrival, and up to that time they had not played a significant role in the economy. For summer travel, large mooseskin boats assumed an importance equivalent to that of dog teams during the winter season. Because of their

large stowage capacity, these boats became more important for summer travel after commercial trapping for the Hudson's Bay Company commenced, and the summer visits to the post had become a more regularized activity.¹¹ In the summer of 1852, Gwich'in were still travelling to the Fort by canoe, but by 1874, mooseskin boats had come into use for the same purpose.¹² These boats were used until 1927. In the summer of 1928, a disastrous epidemic killed many people in Fort McPherson; this date is considered to have been of the utmost importance in permanently orienting more people towards the town rather than towards the bush and the mountains.¹³ In any case, mooseskin boats have not been used after that year.

The developments of this early period did not significantly alter the basic structure of Gwich'in society, that is to say, the mobility of the subsistence economy, and the flexible and egalitarian nature of social relations; neither was the position of games affected in this regard. The trade visits at the Forts, which began to bring together different groups on a more frequent basis than had been the case before, now provided the important opportunities to play the old-time games.

1. *The Dancing Was Decidedly Stunning —* Early Encounters at the Fur Trading Posts

Trade visit patterns at Fort McPherson and Fort Yukon during the initial fur trade developed in a parallel manner, but it appears that the frequency of visits into Fort Yukon was initially somewhat higher than that of visits to the post on Peel River.¹⁴ At Fort Yukon, the summer visits almost immediately developed into short, but intensive, encounters between the various groups oriented towards that post. Fort McPherson, by contrast, was situated at a considerable distance to the north of Teetł'it territory, in the buffer zone separating Inuit and Gwich'in, and the cessation of hostilities between these two groups did not occur until the mid-1850s. The Teetł'it therefore visited the Fort only for a short period of time during early summer.

Alexander Murray had hardly arrived at the future site of the new Fort on the Yukon River, when groups of Gwichaa, Dagoo, Van Tat, and Han congregated there. Extensive sequences of speeches, songs, games and dances established mutually friendly relations. The pre-contact forms were now mobilized for the traditional purpose within the context of more frequent, more regularized, but relatively short meetings at the new trading posts. The visiting groups often did not stay for more than a few days, actively encouraged to take an early departure by post managers who feared that extended visits would put too great a strain on their supplies of tea and tobacco.¹⁵ Foreshortened as these meetings probably were, the days were filled with the traditional forms of entertainment. The listing provided in Figure 8 indicates the approximate sequence of these meetings during the first few years of the fur trade. The scale of the summer gatherings at Fort Yukon was reached at Fort McPherson only after about 1847, when Augustus Peers, arriving from Fort Norman to take over the management of the post, was greeted with songs and dances by "seventy men with their wives

and children."¹⁶ The characteristic events occurring during the initial trade meets have been discussed in the preceding chapter (see page 69ff).

date	Fort McPherson visitors	events	date	Fort Yukon visitors	events
1840.06.15	Fort established		1847.06.26	Fort established	
1840.07.20	'group of Rat Indians'	songs	1847.06.26	group of Gwichaa	oratory
1841.01.23	none during the winter		1847.06.27	La Pierre House people	
1841.03.30	'a group with meat'		1847.06.28 1847.06.28	in the morning: group with 20 canoes in the evening: group with 5 canoes	songs - speeches - exchange of gifts / shooting - dances - oratory - dances - exchange of gifts - dances and songs during the night
1842.05.01	chief 'Grand Blanc' and group		1847.06.30	group of Han	tensions between Han and Teet'it hunter over use of 'bad medicine' - oratory
1842.08.18	'2 Indians'		1847.07.06 1847.07.07	Chief 'Letter Carrier' Van Tat Gwichaa Chief and group of Gwichaa	dispute between Gwichaa chief and Van Tat over death of a woman songs - dances - games - feasts
1843.06.28	chief 'Grand Blanc' and group		1847.08.01	group of Gens du Fou [Han] with 25 canoes	arrive in silence, indicating hostile intent - peace making: race - presents - speeches - dancing
1844.08.03	'2 Indian boys'		1847.08.27	Chief 'Letter Carrier' and group return	'Letter Carrier' receives 'chief's coat' - speeches
1847.09._	'70 Gwich'in and their families'	dances - songs - gifts - oratory -	1847.09.07	group of Han	speeches
1848.03.27	unspecified	muskkrat hunt	1847.09.21	group of Han	
1848.04.27	'several families'		1847.10.29	'several' groups	hostilities over women, drag on until 15 November - oratory
1848.05.23 1848.05.25 1848.06.02 1848.06.14	'Bear Hunter, Kony- ent' 'several Indians' brigade of 19 canoes	delivery of meat muskkrat hunt songs - dances	1847.12.19	'several Indians'	hunting rabbits
1848.06.15 1848.06.20 1848.06.29	'Indians are pouring in every hour' 'numerous' 'a party of Indians'	"troublesome and numerous" muskkrat delivery			

Figure 8 Summer Visits at the Trading Posts in the Early Years of the Fur Trade

date	Fort McPherson visitors	events	date	Fort Yukon visitors	events
1849.05.15 1849.05.20 1849.06.02	'3 Fond du Lac' men unspecified number 24 canoes of 'Fond du Lac' Indians	gifts	1848.05.24	group of 6 Han	trade - 'a large party started to come here'
1849.06.16 1849.06.19 1849.06.21	'Gens du Roche' 'Indians are daily arriving' 'a great many Indians about the fort'	deliver muskrats			
1850.05.25	'many Indians'	ratting	1848.07.14	'group of Gen du Fou'	oratory - trade
1851.04.07	'party of 7 Indians'	deliver fish	1849.06.07	'about 100 Indians'	'great dance'
1852.05.26	'Peel Indians arrived in 15 canoes'	ratting	1850.06.13 1850.06.26 1850.06.28 1850.06.29	12 Indians and fami- lies 'all the Indians' 'most Indians still here' '8 middle band Indi- ans'	'great dance'
			1853.07.07	'a great number'	'many of them have never been here before'

sources: Murray 1910; HBCA, B157/a/1-4; HBCA, B/240/a/1-5;
Augustus Peers, Journal; PAC, MG19/D12

Figure 8 Summer Visits at the Trading Posts in the Early Years of the Fur Trade (continued)

Did the Gwich'in during this period avail themselves of opportunities to adopt games or other past-times of the fur traders which might have complemented the inventory of traditional games? The summer trade excursion was by and large the only visit to the Fort during the year, and exposure to the traders' leisure time activities, such as they were, was minimal. Winter in particular must have been a time of stupendous inactivity and isolation for the fur traders. Augustus Peers expressed the monotony of life during the dark northern winter in a tone of almost lyrical despondency—not the words of a man energetically engaging in games and leisure time activities. His description provides a telling contrast to the atmosphere of festivity which permeated the summer meetings:

In the midst of winter the sun on the other hand denies us the sight of his feeble rays as it does not rise above the horizon ... We therefore lead a somewhat monotonous life, somewhat analogous to a bear, and as grease is too scarce an article to allow us to burn candles at will we either sit peering through the gloom of firelight or else sleep the time away. O happy state of existence! The next morning we get up and before we can gobble down a hasty breakfast the gloomy pale of a twenty hours' night again enshrouds us. These long nights however have their use; for, as we sleep most of the time the long winter does not appear so long as it otherwise would.¹⁷

The one significant occasion which often broke the monotony of this period were the New Year's and Christmas festivities. During this time the traders engaged in games, dances, and a good deal

of feasting of their own.¹⁸ The Gwich'in remained unaware of these feast days and the concepts which occasioned them, for at least two decades, although the occasional visitor arrived at the Fort during these special events. On Christmas Day 1847, for example, five Gwich'in arrived at Peel's River House who, realizing that some special occasion was at hand, availed themselves of the opportunity: "... the Christmas was spent in quietness untill [sic] evening when the indians gave us a series of songs & dances & are now making a great noise."¹⁹ At Fort Yukon, Boxing Day of the subsequent year was marked by a soccer game during which the Fort interpreter Antoine Houle injured his foot.²⁰ Some "Indians from below" [Neets'aiti or Draanjik] arrived at Fort Yukon on New Year's eve of 1849, and probably witnessed the proceedings of the day, which usually consisted of a lavish meal, and of dancing.²¹ Chief Saveah and his family arrived at the Fort on 24 December 1852, and may well have taken part in the season's festivities.²²

Such visits were few and far between, and whatever games and sports of the fur traders the visiting Gwich'in might have witnessed, no discernible effect on the field of the traditional games can retrospectively be made out. A cultural form the Gwich'in adopted much more readily—and soon adapted to their own purposes—were the dances brought in by the fur traders. The earliest evidence of fiddling as a pastime at the Forts in Gwich'in country dates back to 1849,²³ and Robert Kennicott's description indicates that by 1862 some familiarity with the European dances had been acquired:

The day after Christmas Flett gave a ball, whereat were assembled the largest number of whites ever seen at La Pierre's House, besides a dozen or so of Indians. ... The dancing was, I may say without vulgarity, decidedly 'stunning.' I should hardly call it remarkably graceful. The figures, if they may be called such, were only Scotch reels of four, and jigs; and, as the main point to which the dancers' efforts seemed to tend, was to get the largest amount of exercise out of every muscle in the frame in a given time, I must confess that an Indian boy and the fat wife were the best dancers. The music consisted of a very bad performance of one vile, unvarying tune, upon a worse old fiddle, accompanied by a brilliant accompaniment upon a large tin pan.²⁴

The historical position as well as the aesthetic development of Gwich'in music and dance have been examined in detail by Craig Mishler;²⁵ nothing more needs to be said at this point. Subsequent to the commencement of missionary activity in Gwich'in country, however, dances and songs developed into a contested cultural form. It is to these developments that I will now turn.

2. Early Missionary Work and Expansion of the Fur Trade

The year in which Kennicott made the observations quoted above marked the approximate close of the initial period of the fur trade. In that same year the first missionary to permanently reside among the Gwich'in, arrived in the area. Missionary activity had far-reaching consequences for contact-traditional Gwich'in society, not least in its effect on the field of games. Among other

things, it ultimately led to an awareness, though not necessarily acceptance, of the new symbolic meanings represented and produced by events such as Christmas, Easter, and to a lesser extent, New Year's. Missionary activity also served to intensify the symbolic significance of the annual summer trade meets, by gradually suffusing them with elements of religious signification. These events provided new opportunities for feasting, dancing, and games, while at the same introducing new forms which were imported from the south.

The fur trade itself moved into a new phase. Some years after the arrival of the missionaries, Fort Yukon was found to be located on Alaskan territory, and the Hudson's Bay Company was expelled from US territory. Rampart House was erected on the Canadian side of the border as a replacement, but this post had to be moved further east some years later, when it was found to be located on Alaskan territory also. The Gwichaa Gwich'in and other groups trading into Fort Yukon for some years preferred the familiarity of trading with the Hudson's Bay Company to the better exchange rates offered by the American traders, but they eventually shifted their trade back to Fort Yukon; Van Tat Gwich'in, on the other hand, soon oriented their trading activities towards Rampart House.²⁶ After the removal of the Hudson's Bay Company from Alaskan territory, the Anglican church, on the other hand, moved the centre of their operations from Fort Yukon to Fort McPherson, influencing the structure of the social space of Teetl'it Gwich'in society, in the process. The analysis of the effects of missionary work will thus primarily focus on the developments among the Peel River people and at Fort McPherson, and on the work of archdeacon Robert McDonald, who worked in the area from 1862 to 1904.

2.1. Arrival of the Missionaries

Evangelization in Gwich'in country commenced in 1858, as a contest by boat rather than a "foot race," as Hardaker figuratively puts it, but she is certainly correct to state that the pace of those initial endeavors was set by "a frantic sense of competition."²⁷ Oblate missionaries Grollier and Séguin, and Anglican missionaries Hunter and Kirkby followed each other from trading post to trading post, usually travelling in the same Hudson's Bay brigade, but studiously keeping their distance from each other. Confrontations occurred at Forts McPherson and Yukon in the summers of 1859 to 1862.²⁸ In their published account, both parties tended to emphasize their successes, or, perhaps, more appropriately, 'victories,' claiming the instant conversion of people assembled at the annual trade meetings, to their respective faiths.²⁹ In the greater part of Gwich'in country, these confrontations were ultimately settled in favor of the Anglican Church. This can be attributed to no insignificant degree to the assistance rendered the Anglican church by the Hudson's Bay traders, themselves mostly members of the Church of England, many of whom were married to Gwich'in women. The Company provided housing, subsistence, and transportation to the Anglican missionaries while initially sometimes refusing the same to their Oblate counterparts, despite edicts to the contrary issued by the chief factor.³⁰ Equally as important was the HBCo's assistance in interpreting for the missionaries during the trade meets. None of the missionaries initially spoke Gwich'in,

and one sometimes wonders just what the Gwich'in might actually have walked away with at the end of the day. When Séguin attempted to communicate with the Gwich'in assembled at Fort Yukon, he had to rely on a line of communication as tortuous as it was tenuous, speaking through "two women interpreters who spoke a little French and understood Loucheux although they did not speak it. They in turn could communicate with a Loucheux who spoke the jargon of the country ... used primarily for trade."³¹ Séguin retrospectively acknowledged as much: "Je ne les comprenait pas et ils ne comprenaient pas non plus. ... en restant j'étais sur d'une défaite complète."³² By contrast, Strachan Jones, the post manager, rendered McDonald, who also passed the winter of 1862 at Fort Yukon "every aid in his power, towards promoting my missionary work, and in other respects."³³ During this stay, McDonald relied heavily on the assistance of Fort interpreter Antoine Houle to transfer his message into Gwich'in. Houle was considered to be the person most familiar with the language, but an observation made by William Dall at Fort Yukon on 27 June 1867, casts doubt on even Houle's adequacy for this demanding task. Dall was by no means friendly disposed towards either the missionaries or the Gwich'in, but his acerbic report gives an impression of the difficulties faced by McDonald in communicating his message:

His [McDonald's] discourses were rendered into broken Slavé by Antoine Houle. In the evening the Indians, old and young, gathered in the fort-yard and sang several hymns with excellent effect. Altogether, it was a scene which would have delighted the hearts of many very good people who know nothing of the Indian character; and as such will doubtless figure in some missionary report. To any who at all understood the situation, however, the absurdity of the proceeding was so palpable that it appeared almost like blasphemy. Old Sakhniti [Shahnyaati] ... whose hands are bloody with repeated and most atrocious murders, who knows nothing of what we understand by right and wrong—this old heathen was singing as sweetly as his voice would allow, and with quite as much comprehension of the hymn as one of the dogs in the yard. Why will intelligent men still go on, talking three or four times a year to Indians, on doctrinal subjects, by means of a jargon which cannot express an abstract idea ³⁴

No field of religious practice did exist in Gwich'in society at that time, analogy to which would have made meaningful the missionaries' behavior within the context of what traditionally was by and large a private and individual contact with the supernatural.³⁵ It was neither in the power nor the responsibility of the medicine people—this argument has sometimes been advanced—to publicly indoctrinate people in a manner comparable to that of the missionaries. The latter drew part of their authority from a form of cultural capital which had acquired institutionalized permanency at the level of the individual, through the ordination. It will be remembered that permanency of cultural and social capital of this nature did not exist in Gwich'in society, where the leader's and also the medicine person's authority was based on continually demonstrated practical mastery. It is hard to see how the Gwich'in at that time could have had an understanding of the social and institutional

measure of missionary authority.³⁶ This is not least indicated by the frequent, yet inadvertent, challenges to missionary authority when Gwich'in brought the new message within the frame of reference of their own individualistic practical mastery, thereby circumventing the missionary's prerogative as defined by the dogma. Frequent reports from this early phase make mention of dreams and visions in which the visionary, 'dreaming to God' (*ananihiyah*, 'I am dreaming to (about) it'),³⁷ contacted the supreme Deity of the new cosmology in an individual encounter, sometimes perceiving to have acquired the missionary's dogmatic authority in the process. In September 1863, for example, McDonald met "... an Indian who makes pretensions to prophetic authority.... His pretensions are as follows: that he has supernatural communication with heaven, has received a command to teach his fellow men, that those who do not receive his instruction will be punished by God ..."³⁸ It appears more plausible to view these strategies pursued by Gwich'in as an adaptation of the concepts promulgated by the missionaries to the traditional practice, and thus as an affirmation of the latter, rather than as an indication of the "syncretistic"³⁹ acceptance of elements of signification of the Anglican message, and of the practice which produced the latter. The missionaries certainly had no doubt on this point, speaking out against what they viewed as a challenge to their own authority wherever they were confronted with it; they did not view this specific mode of contacting the supreme entity as a proper endorsement of the gospel. While the Anglican church, assisted by the Hudson's Bay Company, was by and large successful in attracting the Gwich'in to their own teachings to the exclusion of the Oblates', it is difficult to share Mishler's certainty that by 1861 "the Gwich'in were placed in a real quandary as to where to place their spiritual allegiance,"⁴⁰ since he does not appear to consider the traditional practice to have been part of the quandary; neither can Krech's contention that "the transition to Christianity appears to have been smooth" be accepted at face value.⁴¹

This digression might appear to bear little relation to the issue under consideration, but the structure of the religious field at this early point had certain consequences for, among other things, the field of games. It becomes clear from what has been said that the demonstration of individual practical mastery rather than reliance on institutionally sanctioned authority was a precondition for the extension and maintenance of the religious field during this initial period. Practical mastery, in this sense and under the conditions of living in Gwich'in country at that time, required of the missionary access to at least two different forms of capital: Linguistic capital, that is to say, the ability to communicate in the Gwich'in language, and, secondly, physical capital, the ability and the willingness to bring to bear the gospel to the largest extent possible through direct personal intervention and surveillance—if the people stayed out on the land for the greater part of the year, the missionary had to travel and go out to them. It is a testimony to McDonald's determination that he acquired both forms of practical mastery (unlike all of his successors, with the exception of Archdeacon Whittaker and the 'Christian leaders'). Yet even as avid a traveller as he could not project the missionary presence permanently and to any significant degree, among all groups within such a

vast territory.⁴² The influence of the Anglican Church during these early years, dependent upon immediate personal intervention on part of the missionary, was thus circumscribed by his ability to travel on the land, and by the development of 'special occasions' which attracted the Gwich'in themselves into the range of his work. Christmas and New Year's, and the extension of the summer meet into a meeting of six weeks' duration suffused with elements of religious signification, brought more people into contact with the missionaries. This bifurcation was also extended into the field of games.

2.2. Institutionalized Religion — Bifurcation of the Field of Games

Between 1862 and 1872, McDonald followed a heavy schedule of annual trips. He regularly commuted between Fort McPherson, Fort Yukon, and Lapierre House, occasionally extending his trips as far west as Nuklukayet and Tanana, while at the same time frequently visiting the Gwich'in in the outlying camps of the area. His visits usually encompassed a sermon, services in Gwich'in and English, and the memorizing of prayers, songs and hymns. Because of the great popularity of singing among the Gwich'in, these attempts were usually met with great interest. Statistics under the heading 'committed to memory' were kept assiduously, because in the early phase of their work, the missionaries considered this to be one of the few ways in which tangible proof of the success of their efforts could be obtained, as they were in direct contact with the people no more often than once or twice a year.

The religious field was not only constructed qua inclusion of these new concepts and messages, but also in direct and often confrontational exclusion of elements of signification of the traditional form, in particular of all expressions of what generally is referred to as 'medicine.' I have already mentioned that McDonald directly challenged one of the foundations of Gwich'in spirituality, the authority of the visionary. Likewise, he soon began to speak out against the authority of the medicine people, or 'shamans.' His conflation of their various powers, viz., the power of healing (that is to say, their 'medical' authority), and the expertise regarding the prediction of future events, under the heading of 'conjuring' constituted a broad challenge to such authority. These demarcations also seem to have included the traditional dance forms, but his own writings contain only indirect reference to such opposition.⁴³

To the extent that the field of games articulated with the field of traditional medicine power, the former was necessarily implicated in these processes. I have already discussed the medicine power implicit in *akàii*, the bouncing game, but that this aspect of the game was of concern to the missionaries is not explicitly expressed anywhere in their writings.⁴⁴ In two respects, however, the opposition to medicine power reproduced through games, became explicit. The first is more in the nature of an anecdote, while the second, medicine in its connection to gambling games, was a continual problem for the missionaries.

2.2.1. *Kootlonjik*

In the first instance, these confrontations were carried over into the domain of games in a somewhat incidental manner. In the summer of 1863, McDonald heard mention of a place named *Kootlo*, which he rendered into English as 'Earth Tumbling Down.'⁴⁵ According to the Rev. David Salmon of Chalkyitsik, this place, *Kuut'ò*, is still known among people around Fort Yukon and in the Black River area. It was a high bluff (McDonald gives the height as 600ft⁴⁶), on Preacher Creek, about 10km upstream from the junction of Preacher and Birch Creeks. The bluff has since been undercut and washed away; it was located about 90km south of Fort Yukon

This was a place which the Gwich'in used for "trials of arrow-shooting, for amusement, as to whether any of them could send an arrow to the top of the hill of Rotlo [*Kootlo*],"⁴⁷ but is also was a place with supernatural qualities. On certain occasions, "supernatural noises" might be heard coming from the hill, "especially when death was about to occur among them."⁴⁸ Under such circumstances, the bow-and-arrow shoot would take on a prognostic function. When the attempt was successful, and the arrow was on its way to the top of the hill, it would either vanish in mid-flight or disappear behind the hill. This was seen as a sure indication that someone was about to die. "It is described by the Indians as marvellous noises as of human beings crying are said to be heard there when death is about to happen, then an arrow shot up the face of the hill always disappear from view before it falls [sic]."⁴⁹ In a rare public expression of interest in aspects of Gwich'in traditional culture, McDonald travelled to *Kootlo*. Upon arriving, he indeed noted that "noise last night and this morning, from crumbling of the front of the hill, disturbed my rest."⁵⁰ He took up the challenge, but was unsuccessful: "Made the experiment of shooting an arrow up the hill, but both bow and arrow being inferior I could not make a fair trial. Certainly the arrow was seen to fall."⁵¹ He went on to point out that, in any event, there had been nothing supernatural about the situation, because the noise had been caused by earth which had been loosened during the spring run-off, and had come crashing down the slope.

The creek's Gwich'in name is given by McDonald as *Kootlonjik*. To dissociate the place from the name with its connotation of supernatural qualities, he renamed it, Hardisty River, but its American name has come to be 'Preacher Creek,' in commemoration of the first discovery of gold in the north—made by McDonald himself in the Preacher Creek area.

Isolated as the incident may have been, it expressed the antagonistic relationship between the field of games and the new field of religion where the articulation was effected in respect of the field of medicine power. The same antagonism was brought to bear in a more sustained form on a game which the Gwich'in did not originally play, but which they learned when the expansion of the fur trade brought them into regular contact with the 'upriver people.' Practitioners of *udzi*, the hand game, can be found in Arctic Red River to this very day.

2.2.2. *J'ai en beau crié et tempêté, je n'ai rien pu gagner — Udzi*

Reverend McDonald 'went out' on his first furlough in May 1872. On his way to Fort Simpson, he passed a weekend at Fort Good Hope, noting that the locals and his two Gwich'in companions spent the Sunday "playing and making a noise;"⁵² that is to say, they were playing the hand game. *Udzi* posed several problems for the missionaries. First, the Dene strongly associated the game with medicine power.⁵³ This was to be opposed for reasons outlined above. Second, the Dene at Forts Good Hope and Simpson—and the Gwichyah and some of the Teet'it Gwich'in after they had developed a taste for the game—were such passionate players that the sheer amount of time devoted to the game left but little occasion for the missionaries to associate with the people. For Bishop Bompas, this was a serious problem: "The most common and open vices ... which seem to keep them most from the reception of the Gospel, are the practices of gambling, conjuring and impurity. To their abandoning of these habits, therefore, our efforts should be specially directed, and no Indian should be considered as a Christian convert until he has entirely abandoned them."⁵⁴ Petitot found expressed in the game the very aspects of 'demoniacal savagery' which his order had set out to ameliorate,⁵⁵ and he considered the game to be one of the major obstacles to the completion of this task: "... les sauvages, qui ne savent rien faire sans grimaces et grotesques bouffonneries, accompagnent ce jeu si simple de contorsions et de gestes ridicules, se balançant et s'agitant comme des démoniaques en présentant les mains à leurs adversaires. [Ils] s'y adonnent avec fureur, jouant sans trêve ni repos, et le jour et la nuit, et y perdent quelque fois tout ce qu'ils ont gagné pendant une année de chasse et de traite. Aussi ce divertissement est-il interdit à nos chrétiens."⁵⁶ His attempts to ban the game, however, proved futile even fourteen years after the composition of the *Étude*. After a prolonged absence, he returned to Fort Good Hope in May 1879. The groups assembling at the post soon commenced to play the hand game, despite Petitot's entreaties to the contrary: "The Indians were full of enthusiasm for the first three days, and then returned again to their gambling. This affected him [Petitot] much. He had longed so much to be back with them again. He gave them beads and medals to any amount, not to speak of other presents (to the Fort people)"⁵⁷

Neither were Séguin's efforts met with great success. Complaining that it had been impossible to instruct a group of Rabbitskin people visiting Fort Good Hope in April 1874, he noted: "Ils dorment ou ils jouent à la main, ou ils préparent un festin"⁵⁸ The same problem developed two years later, but despite speaking out in the strongest terms against the practice, Séguin was unable to dissuade the Gwich'in from playing:

Les sauvages sont au complet ce printemps Ils sont arrivés ici le 17 de ce mois. Le 18 ils ont fait leur campements et le 19 j'ai commencé la mission. Ce jour là la chapelle était quasiment pleine, et je pensais que tous les jours il en aurait été du même, mais j'ai vite été disabusé. Le lendemain, il y en avait à peine 50 ou 60 et depuis ce temps c'est à peu près toujours la même nombre et à peu près les mêmes personnes. Tous les autres ont toujours de bonnes raisons

pour se dispenser de venir. Mais les deux principales et ce qu'ils ne nomment jamais ce sont le jeu de main et la danse. J'ai en beau crié et tempêté, je n'ai rien pu gagner. Ceux là n'en ont pas besoin. La danse et le jeu de main Eyinike zan Kutaodntte, disent-ils.⁵⁹

The Gwichyah Gwich'in were regular visitors at Fort Good Hope during the trade meets of the period, and by 1879 they had mastered the finer points of the game. Séguin was soon to find out that their passion for *udzi* was none inferior to that of the upriver people. He had travelled down the Mackenzie to his mission house at 'Tsikatsig' (Tsiigehtchic, i.e., Arctic Red River), and found that the people awaiting his arrival were busily engaged in the game. Playing day and night, they were soon beset with fatigue, and he appeared to be talking more at the dead than preaching to the living, in his daily sermons: "... ils ont appris le jeu de main et ce jeu fait fureur maintenant parmi eux. Vous n'entendez que cela et le jour et la nuit. Ceux qui jouent ne pensent pas à dormir et par leur cris ils empêchent de dormir les autres. Aussi quand je parlais, c'était non à des vivants, mais à des morts, j'avais beau frappé, tempêté, le sommeil était plus fort que moi. Ils avaient beau faire des efforts pour se tenir réveiller, ils retombaient aussitôt."⁶⁰

The game's attraction was so powerful that it even negated one of the fundamental proscriptions by which the missionaries sought to transform the Gwich'in calendar—the definition of the proper way to pass the Sunday. This point will be taken up again subsequently; it is sufficient for the present purpose to delineate an incident which occurred in late 1872. Slavey and Dogrib people had arrived at Fort Simpson shortly before Christmas. As was the custom when groups met, they began to play *udzi*, in this case on Saturday afternoon. Missionary Reeve noted to his dismay that the competition extended without recess into early Sunday morning:

I was tired last night but found it impossible to sleep owing to the noise made by the Indians who commenced gambling & beating the drum as soon as I laid down I told them it was wrong to gamble on Sunday & tried to dissuade them but unsuccessfully I returned to the other lodge, & during a lull in the game asked them if we should have prayers. They at once consented & were quiet & attentive during the service, but soon after its conclusion they were gambling as earnestly as ever.⁶¹

No Gwich'in were present on this occasion, but as they manned the York boats which travelled up the Mackenzie to Fort Smith for supplies during the annual round of trade meets, they were present on many similar occasions during that time, and the game remained a contentious issue. Bompas was still dubious of the success of his interventions as late as 1884, only assuming that "their gambling seem[ed] to be given up at the Fort,"⁶² but the removal of the game from the vicinity of the trading post was no indicator of the lasting success of missionary work in this regard. The Gwich'in, like the Dene in general, defused this potential conflict in the same manner in which they solved many of their conflicts, through avoidance. The game was alive and well at their camps in the bush, and although the Anglican missionaries may have been temporarily successful in ban-



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Illustration 4 Stick Gambling at Arctic Red River in the 1930s

This was strictly a male pursuit. In the upper illustration, a woman spectator can be seen in the background, squatting on the ground to the left of the tent frame.

I was around Shaek Nitsik about midnight. I heard some sounds from the distance in the north and stopped and listened carefully. What it was made me want to get there as soon as possible but I had to camp overnight before I got there. I enjoyed drums. Somewhere down there, people got together and that was what I heard. I looked down and below I saw some trees. It was a bit dark and I hurried down. After I had built my fire, I realized I had built on ice and not on ground. That was how careless I was. I only had my mind on getting to the drumming. I did not even sleep good that night. When I got there, the people were playing a game called odzee [udzi]. This was where a man by the name of John Martin brought stuff to sell and the people were buying from him. The people came from all over. Some Arctic Red River Indians, some from the Peel River, and Slavey Indians who came over from the Yukon [Tutchone or Han]. The people took advantage of this gathering and played this native game. A few days later, myself, Jimmy Thompson and a man called William Teya were just getting into camp when once again we heard drums from the distance. We arrived there late in the evening and everybody played the game. This was to be the last bash. The game was between Arctic Red and the Slavey Indians. We quickly tied up our dogs, then went to watch the game. When it was finally over, the Arctic Red River Indians won the game. This is how people enjoyed themselves in the early days. Usually when there was a large group of people from different areas meeting, a feast was held, a dance, or this game. Those who did not play watched, and others just went visiting. This was a good time.

— Elijah Andrew

Vignette 4 Udzil

'I only had my mind on getting to the drumming'

ning the game, such as in the vicinity of Fort Simpson, it was very much in evidence during the trade meets at many of the trading posts downriver. The photographs reproduced in Illustration 4 date from the 1930s, when the game was still played at Arctic Red River. As a matter of fact, it was at Fort Simpson during the mid-1920s that Hyacinthe Andre of Arctic Red River, who is one of the remaining practitioners of the art among the Gwichyah, acquired his knowledge of the game. — I will say that the privilege of being treated to an improptu drum concert by that gentleman, when we were pouring over photos taken at a Gwich'in traditional games workshop some fifteen years prior, was one of the highlights of my field research.

The Gwichyah Gwich'in, like the Slavey people from around Fort Simpson and the people of the Sahtu, kept the game outside the reach of missionary intervention by moving it into the bush. Elijah Andrew's testimony to the game's powerful attraction reproduced in Vignette 4 indicates as much. Martin House, where the incident occurred, lay outside the sphere of influence of the missionaries of the time (who travelled considerably less frequently to the outlying camps than had Archdeacon McDonald). The game was indeed played in the bush throughout the year, whenever people met. Mrs. Lucy Vaneltsi of Fort McPherson remembers that "in those days the people here [Teetł'it] met up with Slavey people. We lived the same lives, we got along good together. When the two tribes met together there was another big celebration—peace-dancing and gambling."⁶³ She concluded this statement with the rendition of a gambling song which "they used to sing when they were gambling."⁶⁴ Teetł'it Gwich'in were evidently familiar with the hand game, as well; Victor Stewart explained to me that while it was not played at Fort McPherson, most all of the people knew how to play due to the frequent encounters with 'upriver' people, on the land. The game, as has been pointed out, was invariably a part of these meetings. On the Arctic Red River

side, Mrs. Julian Andre also was a participant in the frequent encounters with upriver people during which the game was played, in one instance while Séguin was still the visiting missionary, and also in the years before and after the great epidemic of 1928.⁶⁵

Udzi had a strong, but temporary hold on the imagination of the Gwich'yah, and to a lesser extent the Teet'it Gwich'in. According to Hyacinthe Andre, the game flourished well into the 1940s, but it never became the habitually grounded local tradition into which it had developed among the people living up south, where it is played with great ardor to this day. The collapse of large-scale fur trading after the second World War and the cessation of steam ship traffic on the Mackenzie on part of the Hudson's Bay Company curtailed the occasions for the regular intergroup meetings. They were replaced by more localized meetings centering around pay treaty day and Dominion Day. The trade meetings with the upriver people had been one of the driving forces behind Gwich'yah involvement in the game, and when they came to an end, so did the game.

The Bay had indirectly brought *udzi* to the Gwich'in, the missionaries had attempted to keep the game at bay. In this, they were by and large unsuccessful, the game was played at Arctic Red River, at the posts upriver and in the bush. Fort McPherson was the one place where the game did not take hold. McDonald was successful, where his colleagues had failed, assisted by factor John Firth who took over the management of the post in 1893. Firth did "not believe at all in the Indian and Eskimo medicine making;"⁶⁶ his interests, as we shall see, lay with games and sports which were more closely attuned to his Scottish background. The Gwich'in took *udzi* with them into the bush, the Bay drew them back to the post for the annual trade meets, creating, in conjunction with the missionaries, new opportunities and a new context for group meetings, feasts, and games.

2.3. New Opportunities and a New Calendar: Christmas and New Year's Festivities

The trade meetings of early summer had fit naturally into the Gwich'in seasonal cycle. They availed themselves of the opening of the waterways after breakup and travelled downriver to the post. This was not the case as far as Christmas and New Year were concerned, and initially Gwich'in visits during those periods of the year were of a coincidental nature. Christmas 1840 was "by no means a time of joy and festivities" for Bell and his isolated crew of six, and the New Year's Day of 1841 was greeted with "an anxiety we feel for the future."⁶⁷ No visitors came to vary "the dull monotony of the daily routine of duty,"⁶⁸ and after a solitary Christmas Day in 1848, Peers looked wistfully back on more eventful instances of the same day, then long past: "Christmas Day!! Oh!—for the days when I was young...."⁶⁹ The festivities during that period would consist of a Christmas feast, and on New Year, a feast and a dance if a sufficient number of people had assembled which was not often the case: "Our force not mustering strong enough to kick up a dust, the evening was spent in smoking & spinning a yarn,"⁷⁰ Peers noted of New Year's day 1849.

It was not until some considerable time after the arrival of the missionaries, the penetration of the new religion into Gwich'in country, and the increasing importance of commercial trapping

That's the time they used, anyway. And early days, they used that time.... And every evening, when the sky is clear, we stay overnight, and just keep track of the moon, keep track of Dipper—Dipper is the Indian time. And the three stars that come up early in the morning, that's the Indian time, that's the real Indian time that they teach children. And the big star over there, right over here towards the north-east, little over just like this [gestures], that's where they point to, these three stars pointed to that star. Everybody knows it in Yukon Flat, they used that time.

And when the long nights begin in November and December, and we have no watch, but in them days they know what time of night it is. And then they stay out, and it get dark, get dark, something like that—'I don't know what time it is,' but they watch the Dipper. The Dipper goes around like this, and the sun goes around like this, the Dipper goes around like this ... and over there, towards the west, it stands up something like this [makes explanatory gestures]—that's late, you know, that's late, round about ten o'clock, and then everybody goes to sleep. My mother keeps the Dipper instead of a clock, you know—in the early days, hard to get a clock. So when my father has no time time [doesn't know what time it is], he looks at the stars, they call it 'the star that comes up before the daylight' ... and then after a while the daylight comes.

The Athabaskan Indians keep track of this, this is their time, anyway, in early days.

— Rev. David Salmon

I drew up a paper for him thus: IIIIIIX, IIIIIIX, IIIIIIX, the long stroke for the week-days, and the crosses for the Lord's-Days, and made a large cross thus, X, over Christmas Day.

— James Hunter, 1859

A great improvement is noticable in the personal appearance of the people, and there are many other signs of progress. Nearly every man carries a watch, and most houses have clocks ...

— St. Matthew's Mission, Journal, 14 July 1912

Vignette 5 Constructing the Calendar

'The real Indian time'

which drew the Gwich'in to the trading post on a more regular basis, that Christmas, and in particular New Year became a more significant event for the Gwich'in.⁷¹ Concomitant with the imposition of new significations, the Gwich'in calendar had to be adapted to a reckoning of time to which no meaningful counterpart existed in the Gwich'in way of organizing the annual cycle. A calendar was required to put the new events into reckoning. This, James Hunter set out to do even during the very first missionary journey into Gwich'in country (see Vignette 5).⁷² The traditional calendar was tied to the immediate concerns of the seasonal cycle, and the abstract reckoning of the new calendar, dissociated from place and season, was not accepted until much later. Mrs. Sarah Simon's story about a New Year's Day which fell into a period of starvation indicates that a pre-constituted occasion for feasting and revelry, which was dissociated from the concretely prevailing conditions, did make little sense to the Gwich'in even as late as the turn of the century:

Early New Year's morning the men got up and made a fire. They were sitting round, still with nothing to eat. The minister told them, 'This is New Year's morning, you have to say: Happy New Year, and shake hands.' Joe Kaye said he was not really happy. He was hungry, but he still had to say it. He didn't even know what it meant to say, 'Happy New Year.' The minister also told them: 'This is 1902.' This is the first time we heard that. In olden days, our ancestors just counted the season.⁷³

2.3.1. At the Trading Post

Reverend McDonald held his first Christmas service at Fort Yukon, in 1862. The journals do not indicate a noticeable increase in the number of Gwich'in visitors in the immediately following years, but in later years, Christmas and New Year's festivities proved to be an event with increasing attraction for a part of the population. On New Year's Day of 1870, 35 Gwichaa were encamped in the vicinity of Fort Yukon; Sahnyaati and his group arrived, bringing the total to almost 55.⁷⁴ Seven Gwichyah Gwich'in families spent the Christmas season of 1873 at Fort Good Hope, and this number increased to twelve families by 1878.⁷⁵ On New Year's 1880, 38 Teet'it and their families paid a visit to Fort McPherson.⁷⁶ By and large, the festivities reached their high point toward the end of the century. The New Year's day proceedings marking the turn of the century were attended by almost 100 Gwich'in at Fort McPherson, and in the subsequent year, "in all, over 100" came.⁷⁷ This was for some time to come the last of the big meetings. Miners on their way to the Klondike gold fields passed the winter of 1898-99 in the vicinity of Fort McPherson and at 'Wind City.' By 1902, the Teet'it Gwich'in had become aware of developments at Dawson City, and many of them began to orient their annual movements towards that place. 100 arrived at the City for Christmas 1902, and "200 in all [were] expected;"⁷⁸ over 200 arrived for Christmas and New Year of 1903.⁷⁹ By contrast, the Christmas service 1911 at Fort McPherson was attended by only 5 Gwich'in.⁸⁰ The Dawson interlude lasted until about 1915, after which time the Gwich'in reoriented their seasonal movements towards Fort McPherson and the Mackenzie Delta. By that time, however, another force of separation had come into existence; after 1905, many children were sent to the mission school in Hay River.

New Year's day rather than Christmas provided the main attraction during these visits. Under the influence of the church, Christmas at the Fort was transformed into a day of rest and prayers rather than feasting and revelry, although conflicts over these arrangements occasionally broke out. Games and feasting were reserved for New Year's, and towards the end of the century, the festivities even began to extend over several days. Perhaps going by the understanding that 'bigger' meant 'better,' the Gwich'in expressed their appreciation of this division by designating Christmas day as *drin tsal*, 'small day,' and New Year's day as *drin cho*, 'big day;' it had become, in Bishop Stringer's words, a "big day for the Indians in the North."⁸¹

The New Year's festivities customarily started with the shooting of rifles at midnight. Occasionally, as was the case on New Year's of 1921, fire works were also part of the event. Shooting on that, as on any other New Year's eve, was kept up throughout the night and into the morning.⁸² After morning service, the people wished each other a 'Happy New Year.' The women, led by the chief's wife, and the men, led by the chief, walked from house to house in separate groups, entering each dwelling, wishing the inhabitants a 'Happy New Year,' and shook hands with everybody. The inhabitants then joined the procession and the group moved on to the next house.⁸³ This custom fell into disuse during the late 1950s or early 1960s, but has recently been revived. — Much to



GMA: NA513/20, W. Dempster

Illustration 5 Feast at John Firth's House, Fort McPherson, Winter 1908-09

"... they put up a feast for me. They had the feast at old man Firth's house. They really made a good feast with the moose that my dad killed. After the feast, they had a dance and some games." — Mrs. Annie B. Robert

the merriment of the group of men entering William Ben's house on New Year's morning of 1994 to wish us 'Happy New Year,' I was caught out in my Stanfields and decked out in my sleeping bag, in the middle of the living room floor. It is not that I hadn't have enough time to get ready for their arrival. The firing of rifles had been heard for the better part of an hour. They all came in, shook hands with everybody present, and helped themselves to some of the cookies and candies which were put out as a treat for the arriving groups. By the time I had shaken hands with everybody, I was sufficiently awake to join the men on the rest of their round.⁸⁴

Following the greetings in the morning, a feast was given by the Hudson's Bay trader, for Natives and non-Natives, respectively: "Upper ten [non-Native traders and missionaries] feed at the H.B.Co. after wh. Indians are feasted."⁸⁵ Responsibility for this feast reverted back to the Gwich'in when sometime during the 1920s, people began to go from house to house to gather contributions for a communal feast.⁸⁶ While many participated in this, it was said that everybody was merely helping out the chief, who was considered to be the event's main organizer (as he indeed was for the New Year's feasts held away from the community at the camps on the land). It was on

these occasions that the people at the door sang a variation of the *akàii* song, asking the residents of the house to contribute to the feast. This has been discussed above (see page 65).⁸⁷

One of the main events of the day where the dog team races which were held after the groups had made the round of the community. These had been a customary feature of the Hudson's Bay New Year's celebrations for a long time, and while they are not mentioned anywhere in the early post journals, they were an established custom by the time McDonald spent his first New Year's Day in the north, at Fort Yukon in 1863.⁸⁸ By 1893, dog team races had become part of the proceedings at Fort McPherson as well, when "Mr. Hodgson & men had two dog teams races."⁸⁹ The races held on New Year's day of 1894 were followed by a dance which lasted until four o'clock in the morning.⁹⁰ In an unusual deviation from established custom, a race was even held on Christmas Day of 1894, and Kenneth Stewart emerged as the winner.⁹¹ In the religious calendar, Christmas Day was considered to be a Sunday, and the missionaries consequently frowned upon such activity. This was also true of the prizes which were given out to the winner of the race, as had become the custom by 1920, when \$50 were shared among the first, second and third-placed.⁹² Prizes usually took the form of merchandise of equivalent value, obtained from the trading post. For a considerable period of time, McDonald and trader John Firth were successful in imposing these restriction concerning Christmas Day festivities, but the range of their actions was limited to those events which occurred at the Fort, it did not extend into the bush. This point will be taken up again, as it had a significant influence on the field of games.

Occasionally, a soccer match was part of the proceedings. New Year's day 1875 at Rampart House was celebrated with a game: "The Indians not knowing how to pass New Year's Day, I advised them to play football. A ball was soon made and a very lively game was played in front of the houses."⁹³

The festivities of the day concluded with a dance, or, in later years, with a series of dances extending over several nights. A group of Gwich'in first took part in such festivities during a coincidental visit to Fort Yukon on New Year's Day 1847. This, however, was one of the few occasions where the dances where of Gwich'in contact-traditional style rather than the square dances of the fur traders. When Robert Kennicott passed Christmas and New Year's of 1862 at LaPierre House, fiddling and jigging were already an established part of the proceedings, and had been adopted by the Gwich'in (see page 98). In the years subsequent to 1867, a feast and "a ball"⁹⁴ given by the chief trader had become an established part of the proceedings at Fort McPherson. The dances on New Year's 1869 lasted throughout the night,⁹⁵ By 1922, the festivities had developed into an event lasting three days.⁹⁶

This sequence of events was maintained with very little variation until the turn of the century (and taken up again at the close of the Dawson interlude). A characteristic sequence has been described by missionary Stringer. The New Year's festivities for 1894 unfolded as follows:

Awakened at 6.30 am by report of guns. Heard some also at midnight. Some firing was kept up most of the night although I did not hear it ... all the Indians shook hands with me & we wished each other 'Happy New Year.' Then the Indians brought their cups and had tea or coffee & cake. Old Man ____ acted as clown of the first detachment and caused some merriment. Then the R.C. Indians and others came. Then the company servants &c. &, last of all Mr. Firth & family & Count de Sainville. I put in my cakes with Archdeacon and did not entertain any but Mr. & Mrs. Firth, the Count & a few others. The men had dog racing during day in which Kenneth [Stewart] came out ahead. Big ball at Mr. Firth's at night ... lasted till 4 in the morning. [2 January:] Big ball again tonight at big house to satisfy those who had not sufficient of the entertainment last night.⁹⁷

The Anglican church was not originally involved in the immediate celebrations, in an active role, but after McDonald's marriage to the Gwich'in woman Julia Kuttug in 1876, his affinal connections induced him to take a more active part in the proceedings. On New Year's Day of 1878, he served 'cake, coffee, and hot chocolate'⁹⁸ to his visitors. This became a regular aspect of the proceedings until his departure in 1904, and it was carried on intermittently by his successors.

The New Year's festivities proved to be a stable attraction for many Gwich'in, and up to the turn of the century, they drew an increasing number of visitors to the Fort, "on it went, and we got a little used to it, more every year."⁹⁹ But this was an attraction which made little reference to the traditional form; old-time games and dances were not part of the festivities at the trading post. In this regard, the field of traditional games was positioned negatively, by exclusion. However, the same process is observable here which I already mentioned with regard to the conflicts over the acceptance of stick gambling. The traditional games were integrated into New Year's and Christmas celebrations until after the turn of the century, when they were played in their traditional surrounds, out on the land.

2.3.2. On the Land

The fact that Christmas and New Year's were of any significance at all for the groups of Gwich'in who passed the festive season at their camps out on the land, was due mainly to the influence of the 'Christian leaders,' that is to say, the Gwich'in lay readers which the Anglican church enlisted soon after McDonald's arrival.¹⁰⁰ While they assisted in extending the imposition of the reckoning of time in accordance with the new calendar, the resulting festivities often owed more to the traditional form than the structures of signification of the new event. In distinction from the proceedings at the trading posts, this was an inversion in a double sense. Not only were the new dances complemented by the traditional games, but the festivities were sometimes extended into Christmas Day itself, as well. This is indicated by the following description which refers to approximately the years 1910-1920. The speaker was born in 1895, and referred to the events as occurring 'when he was a young man.' It is noteworthy, however, that in acknowledging that New Year's day was a 'better' time for games, he makes an implicit distinction between games played on New

Year's (stick pull, and various forms of races), and the games played at Christmas, such as Gwich'in swing, *thya liival*:

People start[ed] to cook before Christmas morning. Later on, when everybody had a good meal at the feast that was held for the celebration of Christmas, everyone started to get ready for the activities that [would] take place after the feast.

They sometimes look for a small lake, they try not to get a very big lake, they then clear it to have a dance. Sometimes they make a swing which is very big, from one tree to another tree. After finishing their meal, they start dancing and playing games, they play from early afternoon until it is dark outside.

.... They pass[ed] Christmas and waited for New Year to come. New Year, more good [better] time for games than Christmas. They have snowshoe races, dog races. New Year's night, people play the stick [pull], both young and old. That's what happened out in the bush long ago, for games.¹⁰¹

A similar observation has been provided by Roddy Peters. The people travelling in the Richardson and Blackstone Mountains would organize a feast on Christmas Day. "They played all kinds of games, and that was the way they celebrated Christmas. They did that for New Year's, too."¹⁰² In Mrs. Laura Thompson's young days, the groups travelling on the land would organize feasts and dances on both Christmas and New Year's. She remembers that this was customary during the time when Andrew Kunnizzi worked as a guide for the RCMP Dawson patrol; this would place the story somewhere in the period of 1915 to 1920.¹⁰³ To a New Year's feast held at a meat camp in the Hungry Lake area, old Christopher Colin contributed two moose which he had shot the previous day; this feast was followed by a dance.¹⁰⁴ Mrs. Martha Stewart points out that, following traditional customs dating well into the pre-contact period, men and women would have their Christmas feast in separate tents.¹⁰⁵

According to some accounts, the bouncing game, *akàii*, was also a part of the proceedings. This is in particular noteworthy as the game was not played during the New Year's celebrations held at the Fort. According to Mrs. Christie Thompson, the game was part of both the Christmas and New Year festivities for the groups assembling in the mountains: "In the wintertime the people would gather in the mountains at Christmas and New Year. The chief would put up a big feast and they would have Indian games to keep entertained. One such game was the blanket toss. They see who can stand on it the longest."¹⁰⁶ Mrs. Lucy Vaneltsi also indicates that the game was played on these occasions, but it is not entirely clear if she refers to both days, or to New Year's day, only.¹⁰⁷ A detailed description has been provided by Mrs. Annie G. Robert who was born in 1880; the events she describes occurred before the turn of the century. This story is noteworthy for several reasons. Firstly, it contains one of only two references to women's participation in the bouncing game that I have been able to find. Secondly, it refers to a Christian leader's (later, Reverend's) involvement in the proceedings, indicating that the old traditions had greater resiliency out on the land than would have been found desirable from the church's perspective:

I was still with my father when we had such a Christmas. Then we had a lavàsdaa [feast]. After the feast the people would say, we will be playing 'putting up akàii.' One by one the men jump[ed] onto it to try their skill. Sometimes, those who were not good at it would fall off. This brought a lot of laughter all around. One minister, Giikhii Edward was really good at this game. He kept calling, 'shizhi' doh chuh!' which means, 'pull harder on the ropes!' After this, my husband's younger brother jumped on, because your [the interviewer's] uncle had just got off, so he also stayed on as long as your uncle did. A woman got on next, it was ... Zalih's younger sister, Kenneth's wife. She jumped on, wearing her caribou skin parka. As she was jumping on the skin, she turned around [somersaults or 'spins'] with each jump. Then she jumped off. *Smart woman!*¹⁰⁸

These reminiscences indicate that the modes of articulation of the field of games with aspects of the new field of institutionalized religion were influenced by the setting of Christmas and New Year's festivities. People spending the Christmas season out on the land, marked the occasion by playing the old-time games, until around the turn of the century and perhaps longer. The distinction between the relative significance of Christmas Day and New Year's Day in respect of games and feasts, which Archdeacon McDonald had been able to impose on those groups of Gwich'in spending the season at the Fort, lost much of its signifying force for people passing the season, out on the land. Under the Christian leaders' guidance, the new occasions were marked out in the bush as well, but this was done in ways which were at variance with the procedures established at the Fort. The annual trade meets were the one 'special occasion' which required presence at the Fort; here, similar structures of signification were in evidence.

2.4. Trade Meets

With the expansion of commercial trapping, the trade meets at the Fort became increasingly more important for the Gwich'in. The spring meets at 'Fish Trap Head' were increasingly shortened in favor of longer stays at the trading post.¹⁰⁹ Although tensions persisted well until after the turn of the century, hostilities between Gwich'in and Inuit had been brought to a close by the mid-1850s. By 1867, Inuit and Gwich'in were dancing together during their annual visit to Fort McPherson in early June.¹¹⁰

2.4.1. Historical Development

Prior to 1877, when the first steam ship travelled down the Mackenzie, the meetings at the post were determined by the schedule of the york boats. The boats started upriver from Fort McPherson towards Fort Smith immediately after break-up. The trip occupied the greater part of the summer, and the boats usually did not return until mid-September. Along the way, races would be held between the various boats, and at Fort Smith—in a variation of the traditional 'backpack race'—the crews engaged in races at the dreaded portage, attempting to beat each other in hauling the cargo over to the other side. During that period of the fur trade, therefore, the trade meeting was bifurcated. The Gwich'in brought their furs to the post before the departure of the york boats, and

returned to the post a second time to pick up their supplies just prior to moving upriver for the fall hunt, and the opening of the trapping season.

The steamship 'Wrigley' made its first voyage down the Mackenzie in 1877. The ship was a sight the Gwich'in were not accustomed to yet, "whenever the whistle was blown, considerable uneasiness seemed to prevail among them."¹¹¹ It did not take them long, however, to make the boat's arrival an occasion for feasting, games, and dancing. By 1893, the "annual arrival of the steamer [had developed into] a time of great excitement & hurry." Reverend Stringer was alerted to the boat's imminent arrival by a Gwich'in man who "hammered on the window and shouted, 'steamer, steamer!'"¹¹² Much the same excitement was evident the subsequent year: "... the cry was raised that the steamer was in sight. How excited the Indians got,"¹¹³ he noted in his journal.

Until 1897, the steamer drew an increasing number of Gwich'in and Inuit visitors to the Fort. After that date, many Inuit stayed away for some years, preferring to trade with the American whaling ships wintering at Hershel Island. The whaling period came to an end by about 1902, and the Inuit resumed their visits to Fort McPherson until about 1911 when Kenneth Stewart opened a trading post on behalf of the Hudson's Bay Company, in the Mackenzie Delta. This post subsequently developed into the settlement of Aklavik, and the Inuit and some Gwich'in increasingly oriented their trade towards that point by 1920.

The commercial fur trade expanded significantly, and by 1920, the Hudson's Bay Company was faced with competition from at least two companies who had their own steam ships (all of which were ultimately bought out by the Bay).¹¹⁴ The summer meeting in the 1920s consequently intensified, and the Gwich'in increased their stays at the post to a period lasting up to six weeks. Some of the people had erected cabins after the turn of the century. They stayed in these during their summer visits, but left them unoccupied for the rest of the year.¹¹⁵ The great epidemic of 1928 marked a downturn in the scale of the event, which was continued as before, but on a smaller scale. It also began to take on added aspects of signification, inasmuch as the visits were now also undertaken for the purpose of attending pay treaty day and the Dominion Day festivities. After the end of the trade meetings, the summer visited centered around July 1st festivities, in particular. This date marked not only Dominion Day, but also the "Gwich'in Sports Day."¹¹⁶ Mrs. Sarah Simon credits Bishop Stringer with this 'invention' but as will be discussed in a subsequent chapter, the event was in fact an amalgam of Stringer's interpretation of the significance of Dominion Day festivities, with the celebrations of 'Founder's Day,' an athletics and games competition held at the Hay River mission school on 18 June of each year.

2.4.2. Gwich'in - Inuit Relations

Initially, games and sports occupied much the same position during these meets as they had during the contact-traditional meetings. Apart from the fun and excitement they provided, they served to reduce the tensions which were always palpable beneath the surface, especially in Gwich'in encounters with the Inuit. These tensions, fuelled by a shared consciousness of extended periods of

bloody and deadly warfare, were never far from the surface. "Everyone was careful to avoid raising bad blood by any mention of bygone troubles,"¹¹⁷ Mitchell noted when he arrived at Fort McPherson in July of 1898.

The games predominantly played between Gwich'in and Inuit were football and wrestling. Football, as was pointed out in the preceding chapter, was one of the rougher Gwich'in traditional games. The level of contained violence it could therefore potentially generate was equivalent to the tensions produced by the awareness of past warfare, but channel them into the delimited time and space of the game occurrence. This at least was the opinion of John Firth, "who looked a man of granite—square, broad, and powerful."¹¹⁸ He was the instigator of this scheme of athletic challenges between Inuit and Gwich'in, consisting of soccer and wrestling matches. Soon after his accession to the position of chief trader at Fort McPherson, Firth found himself embroiled in a life-and-death altercation with an Inuit trade leader who, being dissatisfied with the results of a round of bartering, had been ordered from the trading-room by Firth:

Half an hour later there came a knock on the door. Firth unlatched the door and was opening it warily when the Eskimo chief, who was outside, drove at him with a long heavy snow-knife. Firth was just in time to slam the door to when the blow fell, and the point of the knife drove four inches into the planking; then he quickly whisked the door open again, and this brought the Eskimo into the house headlong, on his face. Then Firth grabbed him, ran him to the edge of the bluff, and kicked him over.¹¹⁹

Almost 30 years later, Firth told the same story to the German trapper Paul Nieman. Nieman concluded that Firth had acquired the authority to organize and arbitrate competitive encounters between Gwich'in and Inuit through this proof of physical prowess. He had demonstrated possession of the same kind of physical capital which he sought to activate in his visitors in order to contain potential violence. In the view of Inuit and Gwich'in alike, he spoke on the basis of proven authority: "Old man Firth had been young and strong in those days, and taught the Indians to wrestle and play football."¹²⁰ Firth's interest in soccer is easily explained by his Scottish background, and his interest in wrestling, as the above description perhaps indicates, by his possession of the appropriate form of physical capital. It may have been due to his influence that no mean football was played at Fort McPherson, as the Klondikers arriving in 1898, were to find out. They challenged the Gwich'in to a match, and were roundly defeated.¹²¹

The people usually arrived for trade four to six weeks prior to the arrival of the steamer. A significant amount of the time spent at the Fort was taken up with games, and football occupied a dominant position, it "was the most popular game, sometimes they play[ed] day and night."¹²² George Robert describes the proceedings in some detail, as follows:

Three goals must be scored before a team wins, even that [then] it takes a long time before one goal is scored. In the hot summer days the players are just dripping with sweat and some of them play without shirts. At times, teams are

almost fighting. When a goal is finally scored, there is a lot of shouting and yelling, and mostly back-slapping. The game is continued till one team scores three times, and the game is ended with the winners receiving either money, cigarettes, a tin of tobacco, or nigger head ['twist tobacco'].¹²³

Abraham Francis is remembered as one the good players from that era, and Andrew Wilson was considered to be the best goal keeper at that time.¹²⁴ Some of the enjoyment occasioned by the game shines through Mrs. Sarah Simon's tribute to his skills:

This is the tallest, big man we had around here I think. That is why his name is Big Andrew, Andrew Wilson. ... He used to be a very strong man and very smart, and quick action, and they used to have a football game all the time, and he is at the goal and no one would push him away, and no one would dare to push him or pass the ball over him, and I used to ask him to do more, keep that going more—I don't want my husband to be in this game, so I give him big boiled meat and tell him to have this for supper, and be strong.¹²⁵

Soccer matches against Inuit teams occasionally appear to have reached a significant level of tension. The games not infrequently threatened to get out of hand, and to produce the kind of serious violence they were intended to prevent. Such was the case during a match William Nerysoo watched in his youth:

I remember one old Eskimo man was sitting at the bank watching the football. From there he shouted out a strong command to his people. I asked Peter Ross at that time: What was that old man saying? That old man was a well-known and respected man. ... the old man said this: 'Long before you people were born—you see that big patch of willow down there, on that island? That's how many people there used to be, you're all bunch of orphans, don't talk about starting up a war again'.¹²⁶

Mrs. Annie B. Robert also remembers that football matches against the Inuit—which were played over three periods rather than two—were characterized by a high degree of excitement. People would frequently get hurt, and fights sometimes broke out.¹²⁷ Often enough, John Firth had to step in and ease the tensions.¹²⁸ In general, soccer matches at the post during the trade meets were an attraction which old-timers look back on fondly. In Jim Koe's words: "My favorite sport was football; the way my people used to play it in McPherson during the summer time. Them days people always had fun with different Indian games. ... This is the happiest time that I remember."¹²⁹

Some time after the turn of the century, the custom developed of putting up a prize for the winner of match. The winning team were presented with tobacco for each of the players; the prize was put up either by the chief or the trader. While the prize itself may not have provided any added motivation or tension, the introduction of an incentive which was extraneous to the goal orientation of the activity itself, was something which had not occupied a very important place in the inventory of Gwich'in traditional games. Among the Teet'it Gwich'in, the only gambling game—that is to say,

a game providing a goal extraneous to the activity itself—was the ring-and-pin game, *itsuhtak*, but the stakes were never very high. The stakes in *udzi*, and the prizes to be won in soccer matches, snowshoe and dog team races provided an innovation aligning the games more with the achievement orientation of modern sports than with the predominantly process-oriented traditional form. This was even more pronounced in the case of poker, taken up by the Gwich'in trading into Dawson City even while the soccer matches were in progress at Fort McPherson. An inauspicious beginning, to be sure, but, in respect of the distributional properties of the field of traditional games, a distinction in principle had been introduced: Prize money in dogteam races and stakes in poker games held the potential to shift the focus of involvement from the game in process itself to external result.

As popular as soccer was at the time, it was by no means the only game to be played during the summer meetings. Wrestling competitions occurred throughout. Mitchell witnessed a wrestling match between Gwich'in and Inuit in which "each man held by a sash that was wound tightly round his opponent's middle, and never shifted his grip; and though the Eskimo were in general much bigger men ... the Indians were so much quicker and more agile that they won four matches out of five."¹³⁰ It appears, however, that on the whole these competitions were held among the Gwich'in themselves rather than with the Inuit, although this is not to imply that these were not hard-fought matches as well. "One time on Sports Day in McPherson, these two men [Big Thomas and Ronnie Pascal] wrestled together and both were very strong. They were both very strong and, wearing new coveralls, the coveralls were torn up but still neither one of them was able to put the other one down."¹³¹ Often the women and men wrestled separately, as had been done in the old days. Much to the amusement of everybody present, the final match would pit Chief Julius against the winner of the women's competition. "One time, there was Roddy Drymeat's grandmother, who knocked down that old Chief Julius ... strong woman, nobody could knock her down."¹³²

The stick pull, *nalàizrak*, was the only strictly traditional game to be played. Teams consisting of six players entered the competition, which followed the traditional 'circular challenge order.' Running races, baseball for the children, and a tug-of-war competition between men and women rounded out the event. An old-timer in Fort McPherson showed me an old, blurred photo in which can be made out at least 18 stout women pulling away with all their might, on one end of the rope alone! The annual tug-of-war competition came to be a central part of the Gwich'in Sports Day proceedings.¹³³

2.5. The Sunday Flag Is Up — Religious Significations

For the Gwich'in, the summer trade meet at the trading post was the period of most intense exposure to the elements of signification of the new religion. By the turn of the century, the meetings had expanded into visits of six weeks' duration, and for the missionaries, this was a time of continuous and often almost frenetic work. Separate services for Inuit and Gwich'in respectively were read daily, summer school was held,¹³⁴ the missionary was visited by the many arriving groups,



GMA: NA513/21, W. Dempster

Illustration 6 Poker Game in Police Post, Fort McPherson, Winter 1908-09

F.J.G. Fitzgerald, McLean, Sgt. Selig

and in turn made the round of the camps himself. At the end of the day, the missionaries often enough felt exhausted from the "incessant rush of native services, visiting, steamers, &c, &c."¹³⁵

While the absence of *akàii* from the list of games played in the vicinity of the Fort, may indicate an indirect influence exerted by the missionaries, their impact on the field of games was in the main concentrated on two points. Firstly, as was discussed above, they opposed *udzi*, the hand game, because of its invocation of medicine power, but also by simple virtue of the fact that it was a gambling game. After the gold rush, and with the arrival of competing traders in the area, this problem, as the church viewed it, increased in scope. Some Gwich'in had developed an intense interest in Poker, and, as is indicated by Illustration 6, even the local RCMP officers were not impervious to the game's attractions. The mission journal for the period 1915-1925 makes frequent reference to by and large unsuccessful attempts to eradicate the game, but what at this point was of more pressing concern to the missionaries was the imposition of rules concerning the proper way to pass the Sunday. This intervention into the naturalized Gwich'in calendar was even more abstract and removed from their practical concerns than had been the introduction of new events such as Christmas and New Year's, into the calendar. Conflicts over Sunday regulations occurred frequently. These affected not only the field of games, but occasionally the basic structure of the

economic field, as well. It was difficult to adapt the exigencies of the subsistence economy to the rigid requirements of the religious calendar. The hunt had to be carried out as the opportunity demanded. The winter of 1875, for example, had brought a severe famine which began with an extended cold spell in mid-October, and lasted well into December; the intense cold had made it impossible to hunt either moose or caribou, and starvation had set in at Fort McPherson. Shortly before Christmas, a moose had finally been wounded, but the animal had escaped. The men intended to pursue it on the subsequent day, but "this morning I was asked to give permission for the moose that was wounded yesterday to be sent after and brought in. I denied it and took occasion to speak a little on the holy observance of the Sabbath."¹³⁶ Unfortunately, the hunters' reaction to his request has not been documented. A similar conflict broke out within a group led by Christian leader James Simon. He had attempted to hold weekday services, but was criticized by a member of the group, a renowned hunter, who objected that such services "were alright for the white people outside who had nothing to do but sit and eat." This man also sent his son out on a Sunday caribou hunt, in defiance of the Christian leader's entreaties.¹³⁷

The new proscriptions were brought home to the Gwich'in with considerable force. While Andrew Flett could report from LaPierre House in 1865 that the Dagoo were keeping the Sunday,¹³⁸ Archdeacon McDonald, attempting to break up a soccer game which was in progress at Fort McPherson on a Sunday, felt compelled to intervene by main force:

Protestant minister McDonald tried to prevent the Loucheux from playing football on a Sunday, alleging they were thus breaking the Sabbath. The Indians being slow to obey, the minister went off in a huff and slapped the face of one of the players. And when the Indians went on with their game, the infuriated minister came out again and announced that unless they stopped their game at once, he would make use of his pistols. At this, one of the exasperated Indians seized the minister by the beard and thrust him down on the ground.¹³⁹

By the turn of the century, McDonald, in cooperation with chief trader Firth, had developed a somewhat more restrained scheme for the imposition of these rules: "During the light nights, it is usual to put up the flags [at the Fort] at 12 Sat. day night to remain 24 hours & the people observe the times."¹⁴⁰ Once Sunday was over, the people reverted to their favorite pastime of the summer: "When the people get together in the summer, they play every night except Sunday, when the Sunday flag is up. As soon as the Hudson's Bay take the flag down, everyone yells, 'Sunday's over!' Everyone goes to play football."¹⁴¹ During the annual trade meet in July 1920, the missionary felt compelled to preach against "gambling and football [on Sundays] ... pitch toss, etc.,"¹⁴² but, as a perusal of the mission journal indicates, did not meet with significant success.

To extend the problematic, brief consideration needs to be given to conflicts over Sunday regulations which occurred during the Christmas and New Year's festivities. Early in the century, a New Year's dance fell on the Saturday. The dancing continued until well after midnight; this, in effect, amounted to a breach of the Sunday regulations. The missionary and an RCMP officer entered the

hall to close down the dance, but "Chief Julius got up, went outside, came back with an axe, and said, 'Okay, put that padlock on the door and I'll break it off'." Officer and missionary left "without saying anything and the dance continued until the wee hours of the morning."¹⁴³ Similarly contentious was a dogteam race which was staged on Christmas Day 1894, and which was won by Kenneth Stewart.¹⁴⁴ Neil McDonald, likewise, had offered prizes for a dogteam race to be held on Christmas Day of 1919. The missionary intervened, and the race was staged on 26 December, instead; even this was a highly unusual date for such an event.¹⁴⁵ On Christmas Day 1923, a feast and a dance were organized by Johnny Kay.¹⁴⁶ By contrast, the New Year's proceedings for the years 1882, 1893, and 1899 were moved to 2 January, because 1 January fell on a Sunday.¹⁴⁷ Conflicts over the proper application of the religious Sunday regulations thus occurred intermittently, but McDonald's successors were not nearly as successful in imposing the religious calendar and proscriptions. This was to become particularly evident in the 1920s and 1930s, when traders arrived in the area who did not have the close connection with the church which had characterized the relationship between McDonald and John Firth. Even before that time, however, Gwich'in oriented towards Dawson City had begun to appreciate the finer points of games such as poker, a game which was to cause some of the conflicts referred to above.

3. Summary

The combined effects of missionary work and Hudson's Bay Company trade policies led to a bifurcation of the field of games. The regular encounters at the trading post at Christmas, New Year's and during the summer trade meet, provided opportunities for the introduction of new cultural forms, in particular European-style dances. The traditional games were in the main played in the camps on the land, but new forms such as dogteam races, prizes and, most notably, the hand game were added to the inventory of games. The introduction of *udzi* was a result of the expansion of the fur trade. The game consequently took a stronger hold among the Gwichyah who had been directly or indirectly involved in the trade for almost 40 years before it expanded into Teet'it territory. Concerning the distributional properties of the field of games, *udzi* was a 'limiting case' for the developing distinction between bush and town, a distinction which at that point in time was defined by the range of effects of missionary work. The opposition to the game brought to bear by the missionaries at the Forts, was neutralized by the Gwich'in by removing it into the bush. The imposition of a religious calendar was circumvented in like manner. The traditional games and the hand game were played in the bush, and they were sometimes played in direct contravention of the regulations of the Anglican calendar, on Christmas Day or on Sundays, well into the 20th century.

Endnotes

- 1 See, Simone Decosse, *Athapaskan-Tlingit Trade Relations*; Susan Ugarenko, *Distribution of the Kutchin*.
- 2 Sheppard Krech, *Changing Trapping Patterns*, p. 34.
- 3 As early as 1811, Gwichyah Gwich'in trading into Fort Good Hope had developed such an interest in beads that on one occasion they "were near creating an uproar ... on account of a deficiency in beads" (Willard Wentzel, "Letters to the Hon. R. McKenzie," p. 110, 28 February 1814). Some 35 years later, the demand was as strong as ever: "Settled with the indians [Han] after breakfast & had some trouble to satisfy them," Murray noted at Fort Yukon. "Beads, Beads is all they cry and we have none to give" (HBCA, B240/a/1, 21 September 1847). See also, for example, PAC, MG19/A29, Anderson to [unidentified], 31 March 1854; HBCA, B240/a/1-2, 7 September 1847, 6 January 1848, 18 April 1848, 6 July 1848, 14 July 1848, 5 June 1849.
- 4 Augustus Peers, *Journal*, 1842-1852, p. 246.
- 5 E.g., PAC, MG19/D12, *Journal of Daily Occurrences*, 27 April 1848, 23 May 1848, 1 July 1848, 31 March 1849, 15 May 1849, 14 April 1850, 25 December 1850, 3 December 1851.
- 6 Richard Slobodin, *Band Organization*, p. 21 f.
- 7 PAC, MG19/A29/vol. 1/file 5, Anderson to Simpson, 20 January 1857.
- 8 PAC, MG19/A29/vol. 1/file 5, Anderson to Simpson, 20 January 1857.
- 9 CGLP, L46/3, Bella Alexie, *How We Lived Long Ago*.
- 10 See, e.g., HBCA, B240/a/5, 5 January 1852, 4 April 1852, 10 April 1852, 25 January 1853, 8 January 1856.
- 11 Richard Slobodin, *Band Organization*, p. 27.
- 12 "The Peel Indians arrived in 15 canoes" (PAC, MG19/D12, *Journal of Daily Occurrences*, 2 June 1849); on 2 June 1874, Clerk Andrew Flett welcomed a group arriving in four mooseskin boats at the Fort (HBCA, B157/a/4, Peel River Post Journal, 2 June 1874).
- 13 See, YTA, MS 88/79, Paul Nieman, *Pioneering in the Canadian North*. Nieman, a German trapper and explorer living in Fort McPherson at that time, was an eyewitness to the disastrous event; Mrs. Sarah Simon remembers him as having been of great assistance to the people during that crisis (GLCC, OT46, Hay River School).
- 14 This impression may also be a reflection of the respective trader's inclination to record these visits in the post journals. Unlike his colleagues at Fort McPherson, Murray at Fort Yukon was a fairly assiduous writer.
- 15 Murray noted in the post journal on 7 June 1849: "There are here at present about 100 Indians. They are now having a great dance in their camp;" most of the visitors had left by 8 June (HBCA, B240/a/1, 7 June 1849, 8 June 1849).
- 16 Augustus Peers, *Journal* 1842-1852, p. 231.
- 17 Augustus Peers, *Journal* 1842-1852, p. 234. Certain passages in this journal indicate that it must have been composed retrospectively towards the end of 1852. Peers did not survive the winter he so eloquently damned; he died at Fort McPherson on 15 March 1853.
- 18 See, Michael Payne, "The Sports, Games, Pastimes and Recreations of the Fur Traders."
- 19 HBCA, B240/a/1, Fort Yukon Post Journal, 25 December 1847.
- 20 HBCA, B240/a/2, Fort Yukon Post Journal, 26 December 1848.
- 21 HBCA, B240/a/3, Fort Yukon Post Journal, 31 December 1849.
- 22 HBCA, B240/a/6, Fort Yukon Post Journal, 24 December 1852.
- 23 Murray pencilled the portrait of a man playing the fiddle onto the last page of one of his many letters (GMA, M879/9, Murray to James [Murray], 20 May 1849).
- 24 Robert Kennicott, "Journal," pp. 109-110.
- 25 Craig Mishler, *The Crooked Stovepipe*; idem, *Gwich'in Athapaskan Music and Dance*.
- 26 Ken Coates, *Best Left as Indians*, pp. 28-31.
- 27 Bernadette Hardaker, *Missionary Contact*, pp. 32, 44. The argument is reiterated by D.T.F. Wootten, *Coming of Christianity*.
- 28 A vivid delineation can be found in Craig Mishler, "Missionaries in Collision."
- 29 E.g., RCA, LDM, 12, Grollier to Faraut, reporting on Séguin's work at Peel River in 1861, referred to "son triomphe complet à Peel's River" (4 July 1862). Having stayed at Fort Yukon for no longer than two weeks, William Kirkby claimed to have effected that "... before I left, the medicine-men openly renounced their craft, polygamists

- freely offered to give up their wives, murderers confessed their crimes, and mothers told of deeds of infanticide that sickened one to hear" ("Indians of the Youkon," p. 257).
- 30 Émile Grouard, *Souvenirs des mex soixantes ans d'apostolat*, p. 54.
 - 31 Mary McCarthy, *Missions of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate*, p. 241.
 - 32 RCA, LDM, 27b, Séguin to Clut, 6 July 1863.
 - 33 Quoted in, Frederick Peake, "Robert McDonald," p. 57.
 - 34 William H. Dall, "Travels on the Yukon," p. 111.
 - 35 To follow Bourdieu's terminology, it is doubtful that the range of experiences within their own culture had provided the Gwich'in with the specific aptitude required for the symbolic consumption of this new message.
 - 36 Even Abel's detailed study, which views this as a clash of different models of religious leadership, proceeds on the basis of evidence obtained from missionary sources alone. Whether the Gwich'in, and other groups of the Dene, for that matter, viewed themselves as being party to just such a clash, is not documented (Kerry Abel, *Drum Songs*, p. 120 ff.).
 - 37 To be 'dreaming to' something or somebody implied the establishment of relations of mutuality, it did not imply a merely supplicatory relationship towards the animal or phenomenon.
 - 38 YTA, MS 85/97, Robert McDonald, Journals, 10 September 1863. See also, Robert McDonald, "Letter from Fort Yukon, 1 June 1863," *Church Missionary Record*, 10 (1865), pp. 110-112; YTA, MS 85/97, Robert McDonald, Journals, 10 June 1863, 23 June 1863, 8 September 1863, 3 November 1864, 12 January 1865, 5 February 1865, 21 May 1865, 19 to 26 June 1865; PAC, MG17/B2, Vincent Sim, *Journal of Yukon River Journey*, 15 June to 25 August 1883, 14 July 1883. Even Christian leader John Tsieltla confessed to a similar vision as late as January 1891 (HBCA, B157/a/6, 25 January 1891). See also GLCC, OT97, Johnny Semple, *Gwich'in History and Stories*.
 - 39 See, Kerry Abel, "Of Two Minds."
 - 40 Craig Mishler, "Missionaries in Collision," p. 121
 - 41 Sheppard Krech, *Changing Trapping Patterns*, p. 44.
 - 42 The frequency of these trips diminishes noticeably after his first trip to England, his marriage, and the relocation from Fort Yukon to Fort McPherson, between 1872 and 1876. A tabulated overview of McDonald's travels has been compiled by Linda Johnson (YTA, 016.2663 Joh, *An Index to the Journals of Robert McDonald*).
 - 43 YTA, MS 85/97, Robert McDonald, Journals, 4 June 1877.
 - 44 It will be remembered that akàii was a winter game and that the extended contacts between missionaries and Gwich'in usually occurred during the summer trade meets. This missionaries may not have been aware of the game's existence, let alone its significations.
 - 45 YTA, MS 85/97, Robert McDonald, Journals, 20 July 1863.
 - 46 YTA, MS 85/97, Robert McDonald, Journals, 20 July 1863.
 - 47 Robert McDonald, "Letter from Fort Yukon, 1 June 1863," *Church Missionary Record*, 10 (1865), p. 121.
 - 48 Robert McDonald, "Letter from Fort Yukon, 1 June 1863," *Church Missionary Record*, 10 (1865), p. 121
 - 49 YTA, MS 85/97, Robert McDonald, Journals, 15 July 1863.
 - 50 YTA, MS 85/97, Robert McDonald, Journals, 21 July 1863.
 - 51 YTA, MS 85/97, Robert McDonald, Journals, 21 July 1863.
 - 52 YTA, MS 85/97, Robert McDonald, Journals, 19 May 1872.
 - 53 See, George Blondin, *When the World Was New*, pp. 137, 145, 155, 186, 189, 230, 241.
 - 54 William Bompas, "From the Bishop of Athabasca's First Charge," *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, 3 (1878), p. 44.
 - 55 Martha McCarthy, *Missions of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate*, provides an analysis of the relationship between Oblate philosophy and 19th century evolutionist anthropology; see, Jean Usher, "Apostles and Aborigines," for an analysis of the philosophy of the CMS.
 - 56 Émile Petitot, *Étude sur la nation Montagnaise*, p. 545. Petitot completed the manuscript in July 1865. 108
 - 57 RCA, LDM, 14b, Kearney to Clut, 30 May 1879.
 - 58 RCA, LDM, 27a, Séguin to Clut, 2 June 1874.
 - 59 RCA, LDM, 27a, Séguin to Clut, 29 May 1876; the quoted passage is contained in an addendum dated 10 May 1876.
 - 60 RCA, LDM, 27b, Séguin to Clut, 3 July 1879.

- 61 William D. Reeve, Fort Simpson Mission Journal, 19 December 1872, quoted in: Kerry Abel, *Drum Songs*, p. 122; an edited version of this passage, reproduced in the *Church Missionary Intelligencer* (11(1875), pp. 61-63), omits mention of Reeve's unsuccessful intervention, but embellishes his description with a reference to "the bellish din of the drum" (p. 63).
- 62 William Bompas, "Extracts from the Annual Letter, Northwest America, Diocese of Athabasca," *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, 9 (1884), p. 168.
- 63 CGLP, L4/10, Lucy Vaneltzi, *Traditional Life*, #2.
- 64 YNLC, Lucy Vaneltzi, *Traditional Life*, #2. This version is a photocopy of the original manuscript translation. The reference to the gambling song was omitted from the version published in CGLP, L4/10.
- 65 CGLP, L7/1-12, Julian Andre, *Life Story of Julian Andre*.
- 66 GSA, M74/5/1B, Stringer Papers, Daily Journals, 23 January 1894. Firth had been employed at LaPierre House and Rampart House since 1880, and by the time he moved to Fort McPherson to take over the management of that post, he was intimately familiar with the Gwich'in way of life.
- 67 HBCA, B157/a/1, 25 December 1840, 1 January 1841.
- 68 HBCA, B157/a/1, 25 December 1840, 23 January 1841.
- 69 PAC, MG19/D12, Journal of Daily Occurrences, 25 December 1848.
- 70 PAC, MG19/D12, Journal of Daily Occurrences, 1 January 1849.
- 71 Richard Slobodin, *Band Organization*, p. 27ff.
- 72 James Hunter "Exploratory Mission Journey to the Mackenzie River Districts," *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, 10 (1859), p. 240. See also, RLA, MS 48/box 1/ ledger 1, Albert Tritt, Arctic Village Journals.
- 73 GLCC, OT-, Sarah Simon, Christmas Stories of Long Ago. A similar story has been told by Mrs. Lucy Vaneltzi (CGLP, L4/10, *Traditional Life*, #2).
- 74 YTA, MS 85/79, Robert McDonald, Journals, 1 January 1870.
- 75 RCA, LDM, 27a, Séguin to Clut, 5 February 1874; 27b, Séguin to Clut, 14 February 1879.
- 76 YTA, MS 85/79, Robert McDonald, Journals, 1 January 1880.
- 77 PAC, MG9/G3/2, Journal of St. Matthew's Mission, 1 January 1900; YTA, MS 85/79, Robert McDonald, Journals, 1 January 1901.
- 78 *Klondike Nugget*, 24 December 1902.
- 79 *Yukon Sun*, 23 December 1903.
- 80 PAC, MG9/G3/2, Journal of St. Matthew's Mission, 25 December 1911.
- 81 GSA, M74/5/1B, Stringer Papers, Daily Journals, 1 January 1893.
- 82 PAC, MG9/G3/2, Journal of St. Matthew's Mission, 1 January 1921.
- 83 See, Margery Hinds, *School-House in the Arctic* (pp. 55-56), for a description of events in the late 1940s.
- 84 I might note in passing that the shaking of hands as a gesture of greeting was not a traditional custom. Introduced by the missionaries, it was soon adopted by the Gwich'in, in particular so as it was not initially clear to them whether the gesture might not be an invocation of an unknown form of medicine power. It soon developed into a "great institution" (GSA, M56/2/C24, Thomas Canham, Notes and Jottings on the Indians), and Bishop Lucas, coming off the boat on his annual summer visit to Fort McPherson in 1916, had the feeling of "running the gauntlet," having to shake hands with each individual in a crowd of several hundred (PAA, 70.381/MR201/1, Diary of Tour of Inspection of Missions, 2 July 1916). 'Kissing day,' according to Canham, is the interlinear translation of the Gwich'in term for 'shaking hands.' I have not been able to obtain an interpretation of this usage. See also, David Norton, 'I Shake Hands With You.'
- 85 PAC, MG9/G3/2, Journal of St. Matthew's Mission, 1 January 1923.
- 86 My impression is that this change was somehow related to the retirement of John Firth in 1920, but I have not been able to verify this.
- 87 The specific form this custom took for people passing the day in the community, suggests a fusion of the traditional custom with the Scottish custom of Hogmanay when children traditionally go from house to house asking for presents.
- 88 YTA, MS85/97, Robert McDonald, Journals, 1 January 1863.
- 89 GSA, M74/5/1A1, Stringer Papers, Letters Outgoing, Isaac Stringer to Sadie Alexander, 23 January 1893.
- 90 GSA, MG74/5/1B, Stringer Papers, Daily Journals, 1 January 1894.

- 91 GSA, MG74/5/1B, Stringer Papers, Daily Journals, 25 December 1894. Stewart later gained some fame as a guide for the RNWMP Dawson patrol.
- 92 PAC, MG9/G3/2, Journal of St. Matthew's Mission, 31 December 1920. That dog team races could be a way in which to acquire money had been demonstrated to Gwich'in children at the mission school in Hay River some years earlier; Principal Vale himself put up the prize money for the event held on of New Year's day 1909 (PAA, 70.387/MR4/3/9/4, Journal of Events, St. Peter's Mission School, 1 January 1909).
- 93 PAC, MG17/B2, Kenneth McDonald, Journals, 1 January 1875.
- 94 YTA, MS85/97, Robert McDonald, Journals, 1 January 1867.
- 95 YTA, MS85/97, Robert McDonald, Journals, 1 January 1869.
- 96 PAA, 70.387/MR200/28, Crisall to Lucas, 7 February 1922.
- 97 GSA, M74/5/1B, Stringer Papers, Daily Journals, 1-2 January 1894.
- 98 YTA, MS 85/97, Robert McDonald, Journals, 31 December 1877, 1 January 1878.
- 99 CGLP, L26/2, Donald Greenland, *Memories of Christmas*.
- 100 See Effie Linklater & Lee Sax, *Gikhyi*, for biographical essays on the Christian leaders.
- 101 GLCC, OT20, William Nerysoo, Games.
- 102 CGLP, L49/7, Roddy Peters, *Fort McPherson Loucheux Indians*.
- 103 CGLP, L51/1, Laura Pascal, *Winter Time in the Yukon*.
- 104 CGLP, L32/2, Christopher Colin, *A Long Time Ago*.
- 105 HSFC, Martha Stewart, Traditional Gwich'in Games.
- 106 CGLP, L10/2, Christie Thompson, *Life up the River*.
- 107 CGLP, L4/10, Lucy Vaneltsi, *Traditional Life*, #3.
- 108 GLCC, OT37, Annie G. Robert, Traditional Games.
- 109 Richard Slobodin, *Band Organization*, p. 27ff.
- 110 YTA, MS85/97, Robert McDonald, Journals, 10 June 1867.
- 111 GMA, M1346, Joseph Wrigley, Journal 1887.
- 112 GSA, M74/5/1B, Stringer Papers, Daily Journals, 14 July 1893, 18 July 1893.
- 113 GSA, M74/5/1B, Stringer Papers, Daily Journals, 9 July 1894.
- 114 See, AvCon Aviation Consultants, Historical Activity Data.
- 115 PAA, 70.387/MR200/28, James Crisall, Information concerning Fort McPherson, N.W.T., July 1922.
- 116 HSFC, Sarah Simon, Traditional Loucheux Games.
- 117 Angus Graham, *Golden Grindstone*, p. 93.
- 118 Angus Graham, *Golden Grindstone*, p. 89.
- 119 Angus Graham, *Golden Grindstone*, p. 89.
- 120 YTA, MS 80/79, Paul Nieman, In the Land of the Midnight Sun, p.100.
- 121 CGLP, L32/1-5, Christopher Colin, *A Long Time Ago*, #1-5.
- 122 CGLP, L4/10, Lucy Vaneltsi, *Traditional Life*, #3.
- 123 HSFC, George Robert, Explaining Indian Football.
- 124 HSFC, Martha Stewart, Traditional Gwich'in Games; HSFC, Sarah Simon, Traditional Loucheux Games.
- 125 Sarah Simon, MVPI, *Transcripts of Proceedings at Community Hearings*, vol. 11, pp. 1056-1057.
- 126 CGLP, L11/10, William Nerysoo, *Story of Long Ago*.
- 127 GLCC, OT20, Annie B. Robert, Stories of Long Ago and Present.
- 128 HSFC, Martha Stewart, Traditional Gwich'in Games.
- 129 CGLP, L52/2-3, Jim Koe, *A Long Time Ago*, #2-3.
- 130 Angus Graham, *Golden Grindstone*, p. 91.
- 131 CGLP, L51/2, Laura Pascal, *People of the Mountains*.
- 132 HSFC, Martha Stewart, Traditional Gwich'in Games.
- 133 CGLP, L4/10, Lucy Vaneltsi, *Traditional Life*, #2; HSFC, Sarah Simon, Traditional Loucheux Games.

- 134 As the exposure for those attending school was limited to the duration of the visit, this form of pedagogical work remained, in the view of Archdeacon Canham, fairly ineffective until the end of the century (see, Charles Middleton, "A Voice from the Yukon Gold District," p. 184).
- 135 PAC, MG9/G3/2, Journal of St. Matthew's Mission, 1 August 1919.
- 136 PAC, MG17/B2, Kenneth McDonald, Journals, 12 October 1875, 18, 19 December 1875.
- 137 PAC, MG9/3/2, Journal of St. Matthew's Mission, April 1936.
- 138 YTA, MS97/85, Robert McDonald, Journals, 5 May 1865.
- 139 Emile Petitot, "Letter from Good Hope," 30 May 1870, *Missions des Oblates*, 3 (1873); quoted in: Donat Savoie, *Amerindians of the Canadian Northwest*, p. 194. This statement has to be taken with a grain of salt, coming from a missionary of the Oblate church. At the time of Petitot's writing, the competition between Anglicans and Oblates was still intense. On the other hand, a comparable statement can be found in Séguin's letters: "... il [McDonald] a eut querelles avec ses agneaux à Peel's River et son zèle pour la gloire de Dieu a été si loin qu'il les a menacé de son revolver s'ils n'obeissant pas à ses ordres" (RCA, LDM, 27a, Séguin to Clut, 18 February 1870). Evidence can also be found in the HBCo post journal: McDonald on at least one occasion physically assaulted an old Gwich'in man (HBCA, B157/a/6, Peel River Post Journal, 9 March 1889).
- 140 PAC, MG9/3/2, Journal of St. Matthew's Mission, 16 June 1897.
- 141 HSFC, Andrew Kunnizzi, Loucheux Games.
- 142 PAC, MG9/3/2, Journal of St. Matthew's Mission, 4 July 1920.
- 143 Sarah Jerome, "Chief Julius."
- 144 GSA, M74/5/1B, Stringer Collection, Daily Journals, 25 December 1894.
- 145 PAC, MG9//3/2, Journal of St. Matthew's Mission, 24-26 December 1919.
- 146 PAC, MG9/3/2, Journal of St. Matthew's Mission, 25 December 1923.
- 147 HBCA, B/157/a/5, 2 January; YTA, MS 85/97, Robert McDonald, Journals, 2 January 1893; PAC, MG9/3/2, Journal of St. Matthew's Mission, 2 January 1899.

CHAPTER 6

THE KLONDIKE GOLD RUSH

I remember one particular whiteman named old Camble [Campbell]. He was an old miner and also a millionaire. He had twelve men and two doctors travelling with him. One time old Camble was going to pay his men and doctors. Old Camble was going to the gold rush.

— Christopher Colin

When news of the discovery of gold on Bonanza Creek in August 1896 reached San Francisco, tens of thousands of gold seekers stampeded into the southern part of what is now Yukon Territory.¹ Most followed the difficult Chilkoot trail through the coastal mountains of Alaska. A smaller contingent chose the more circuitous route through Edmonton: to Great Slave Lake via Lake Athabasca; down the Mackenzie River; then via Rat or Wind River into Yukon and on to the gold-fields. Dawson City, which in September 1896 had amounted to not much more than a tent camp, had by the summer of 1898 ballooned to a temporary maximum population of probably 50,000.² Even by 1904, when many unsuccessful stampedeers had left the area, the population of the city and its outlying camps still stood at over 16,000.³ The gold seekers had arrived, bringing with them the western and northern Frontiers. When the Gwich'in travelled south to find out what the cause of all the excitement was, they were in for a discovery of their own.⁴ The movement of the Frontier had come to a temporary halt on the southern reaches of their country, and Dawson City had come to be located in the middle of the territory of their neighbors, the Han.

1. The Economic Field

The immediate impact of these events on the Native cultures was felt in the economic field. Han and Gwich'in had occupied central positions in the fur trade for the 50 years preceding the gold rush, but, being at the time of the stampede neither interested in staking claims nor in obtaining permanent wage labor, they were soon relegated to a peripheral position in the newly forming, incipient industrial economy. A small number were seasonally integrated into the wage economy, working for the miners or as wood cutters for the steamboats, but the main area of Native involve-

ment came to be provision hunting and trapping, supplying the market in Dawson with furs, and caribou and moose meat.⁵ These activities could conveniently be integrated into the general seasonal cycle of the Gwich'in hunting economy. In the years following the turn of the century, many people formerly trading into Fort McPherson, some 750 km north of Dawson, oriented their economic activities towards the new community, where they were able to obtain better terms of trade than were offered them at the time by the local Hudson's Bay Company trading post.⁶ They would travel to Dawson by dog team for certain periods of the year to trade, but would stay in their traditional hunting territories along the Peel, Hart and Blackstone Rivers at other times of the year. These Gwich'in became known locally as the 'Dawson Boys.'⁷ Rather than stay in Dawson itself, they would visit with the Han Indians at the village of Moosehide, some five kilometers north of the city.⁸ Moosehide had been established in 1897 at the intervention of the Anglican Church in order to provide the Han with a place of residence away from the perceived or existing dangers and 'vices' of the frontier community, foremost among which Bishop Bompas considered to be "alcohol and gambling."⁹

The clear demarcation evident in early contacts between Native people and the goldrush community was thus implied by the structure of the extant economic relationships, and it was in the main only bridged where the respective economic interests necessitated temporary contacts. There existed, moreover, little inclination on either side to extend the contacts beyond the economically necessary, into the cultural domain proper. Early contacts in the space of sports and recreational activities followed a similar pattern. This led to the formation of a tri-partite structure intersecting the field of sports and games. The Han and Gwich'in followed their traditional way of life in the bush and on the trail, at a distance from the frontier community and its developing cultural and sporting activities. The stampedeers at Dawson, secondly, soon began to institutionalize sporting structures normalized in accordance with predispositions which had been formed in the south, but which were actualized under the peculiarly fluid and unpredictable conditions of the frontier, located in a difficult and unforgiving northern environment. An habitual, if not intentional, segregation of the Native domain was one of the noticeable elements of this process. The signifying force, thirdly, of events invoking elements of national and political identity temporarily bridged the separation. Han and Gwich'in took part, after a fashion, in Empire Day or July 1 and July 4 celebrations; even here, the demarcations were ultimately reproduced, albeit in a somewhat subtler form. This will be considered at a later point. First, the characteristics of the system of normalized recreational and sporting activities need to be considered.

2. Recreational Activities: The 'Social World' of the Saloon

The excitement of life on the gold rush frontier has been chronicled minutely and extensively; among recreational activities, gambling and the consumption of alcohol predominated.¹⁰ The saloons, according to one contemporary, were "the custodians of [gold] dust," and thus—the con-



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Illustration 7 Winter 1901— Gwich'in Arriving at Dawson City for Trade

nection must have seemed rather obvious— “the centre of social life”.¹¹ As gold dust, or money, for that matter, were not items Han and Gwich'in then particularly cared to possess,¹² they lacked the material wherewithal for involvement in card games and gambling, which therefore were not initially part of their customary activities when they visited Dawson. Furthermore, legislation was soon passed which prohibited the consumption of alcohol among Natives. Since a habitual association of gambling and alcohol consumption existed, restriction of access to the one implied restricted access to the other; the drinking and gambling parties, in consequence, were soon removed to the camps and cabins in the bush.¹³ It was a rare event indeed when Natives joined the gambling games which were in constant progress at the saloons. The singularity of the situation is reflected in the following newspaper report, suffused as it is with an undercurrent of derogation and racism, which appeared in the *Dawson Daily News*. A Han teenager had won a few dollars during a rare visit to one of the Blackjack tables. On the subsequent Monday morning, a group led by Chief Isaac entered the same saloon to try their luck,

... seated themselves gravely around one of the tables and prepared, without a word, to wait until some dealer should appear. It was five hours before the dealer came, but at his appearance eleven greasy, grimy wads of money were produced, and the silent native sons grudgingly signified they wanted cards. The inevitable happened, of course [i.e., they lost their money] Isaac glared like a tiger for a moment, while ten swarty warriors jibbered to him in what sounded like the inarticulate noises made by the deaf and dumb. ... Their child-

ish triumph when they won, and sullen despair when they lost, is beyond all description.¹⁴

It took the wage economy centered on Dawson City almost twenty years to penetrate this particular aspect of Han and Gwich'in culture. An observer noted that by 1918, the Han had become "no mean exponents"¹⁵ of the game of poker, and the well-known Gwich'in leader James Simon recalls his frustration when, after finishing his work on one of the steamboats for the season during that same period, he received next to no pay for his work—he had lost it all during the poker games continually played among the crew members:

I was gambling with what I earned I worked all summer and I thought to myself that I was going to have a good time after work with the money I earned. Later, after work, our boss told us we were free to go to town, so I went to collect my money (we got paid right there in cash), so when I asked for my earnings, seventy-five cents was given to me. I couldn't believe it! Seventy-five cents only! ... I never even went to shore.¹⁶

It bears also mention in passing that the referent for normalized forms of racism such as were directed at Chief Isaac and his men, were discursively constructed of a *topos* combining posited Native inferior intelligence ('inarticulate noises') with uncivilized dirtiness ('greasy and grimy') and a general diffuse reference to an impenetrable otherness ('jibberish'). No such presuppositions were brought to bear on Han or Gwich'in (or certainly not anywhere expressly stated) when they arrived in town as providers of meat or as guides for the famed RCMP Dawson patrol. Such contextual domestication of the 'far side' of the frontier into a complementary position of inferiority provided the stabilizing contrastive element distinguishing the 'civilized' side of that same frontier. An extensive analysis of the newspapers of the period would demonstrate that a *topos* constructed through these peculiar conglomerations and juxtapositions, runs through much of the publicized discourse. Vignette 6 gives an impression of characteristic elements of signification which were mobilized in this context.

The Han and Gwich'in, for their part, were wise enough to keep their distance from the vortex of social life in the saloons. Indeed, noting that the numerous saloons and hotels in Dawson City were identified by grandiose appellations such as the 'Monte Carlo,' the 'Opera House,' or the 'Palace,'¹⁷ one observer wondered why no names meaningful to the Native people of the area had been selected, which, he surmised, could have been used with equal or greater justification: "A hotel is the last place in the world where an Indian or anybody who acts like an Indian is welcome."¹⁸ A pool hall reserved for the exclusive use of Native people was a further expression of this separation in the field of leisure activities.¹⁹ It is interesting to note here in passing that this separation replicated itself within the context of the saloons and bars; the frontier community itself was divided in a similar manner. Hotels and bars not only expressed the hierarchy between non-Natives and Natives by the absence of the latter, they served as a forum for the expression of differential status

Curious Indians

There was a touch of pathos in every heart. A sympathy inexpressable. The multicolored lights shone down on well dressed men and more fashionably dressed women. Inside the place the mirrors and the fixtures were dressed in colors pleasing to the eye, reflecting the generous glow of the incandescents [gas lights]. Enchanted by the brilliant colors of the place, their eyes dancing with interest in the movements of the many sights that were presented to them, their ears alert at the sound of music and revelry, eleven moon-faced malamutes—Indians [Tanana], not dogs—part of the crew of the Cudahy, stood outside and caught best they could those things that pleased them most.

...the proprietor, seeing the interest of these moon-faced sons of the North, beckoned them to seats where they might intoxicate the eye and ear with strange and pleasing sights and sounds.

Benath their ill-smelling and foully be-smearred, though absolutely all-cotton shirts, there beat the heart of humans. Just reaching for the first rung on the upward move, so to speak. Those eyes perhaps as quick as any in the room, missed nothing within their range of vision. And from their depths there came a light which, when read, caused a touch of pathos in every heart—a touch of that nature that makes the whole world kin.

Poor Lo, the Indian.

Poor, ignorant Lo!

From every heart which beat under a white breast there came a feeling of satisfaction at seeing these poor brothers of our own race—low though they be on the ladder—so overflowing with enjoyment.

— Yukon World, 27 June 1905

Vignette 6 On Being Civilized on the Gold Rush Frontier

'Enchanted by brilliant colors'

positions among members of the non-Native frontier community itself. The regular audience at the 'Monte Carlo' were seated on boards placed on stools along the sides of the dance floor, while the high class of Dawson, "... 'Eldorado kings,' government officials, and other 'dead game sport' ..." ²⁰ occupied reserved boxes, "raised sufficiently to allow the occupants ... to see over the heads of the common herd." ²¹ The unexpressed expectation was that occupants of the boxes would consume the more expensive champagne rather than the cheap whiskey. ²²

3. Normalization: Sports of the Frontier Community

A noteworthy feature of the field of sports is the rapidity with which an institutionalized system of competitions and leagues, prizes, medals, and Yukon or Klondike championships developed after the turn of the century. The organizational backbone of this system, in brief, were 'challenges,' the contingent of the North West Mounted Police (NWMP, later Royal Canadian Mounted Police, RCMP) stationed in the city; and the Dawson Amateur Athletic Association (DAAA).

Seasonal activities in a given sport were often initiated through 'challenges.' By the summer of 1898, more than 50,000 people had entered Yukon; ²³ in the May of 1900, the population still stood at over 16,000, ²⁴ only to apparently increase again to more than 24,000 by 1901; ²⁵ such oscillations were indicative of significant demographic volatility. It was therefore difficult to predict the stability and continued existence of sports teams from season to season. Informal pick-up games in a given sport might of course be arranged at any given moment, but the more regularized activities

were often initiated in the form of a challenge by a newly-formed or re-formed team, and often to members or teams of the NWMP (who constituted a permanent presence and whose members had, as it were, a professional interest in physical activities and sport). Once a challenge had been made public in one of the numerous newspapers, others interested in taking part in the competition attempted to organize further teams. A typical Dawson sports league formed in this manner consisted of three or four teams.

By late 1902, the DAAA emerged as a stabilizing and organizing force, making the challenges superfluous. The DAAA was not linked to any one sport in particular, but fielded teams in more or less all of them. It provided infrastructural support in form of several rinks, a gymnasium, and equipment, and, at the organizational level, through officiating and rule expertise. Since its directorship consisted mainly of the merchant and managerial elite of Dawson,²⁶ tied to the community by their economic interests, it provided durable institutional stability. The DAAA had been active in the community in a minor role since at least May 1900,²⁷ but it only began to exert influence after its formal incorporation,²⁸ publicly marked by the opening of the new 'DAAA Gymnasium' in November 1902. This facility had been built at a cost of almost \$20,000, subscribed by its shareholders. The Gymnasium consisted of: two indoor curling rinks; a hockey rink; a second floor inside running track (which doubled as a bicycle track or as stands for spectators of the hockey matches played downstairs); a gymnasium; a sauna and showers; a buffet; a meeting room for the shareholders and directors, and, for the discerning gentleman, "at the southeast corner of the building ... a square tower, with large windows all round it. A man may lounge here during the summer afternoons, and watch the ships come in."²⁹ — All of this under a single roof: The Gymnasium was far and wide the largest building in Yukon.

The Gymnasium opened, and Dawson "... went skating mad. If you want to find a man, go to the rink ... if your child is lost, go no place but the rink. The rink and athletic association has become so popular ... that people now are beginning to wonder how it was possible to have gotten along without it in the past years."³⁰ A number of leagues which availed themselves of the new facilities were inceptioned in brief succession: a hockey league; two curling leagues; a basketball league and an indoor baseball league who played their games in the hockey arena; the ice was covered with six inches of sawdust, the diamond was marked out by canvas suspended taut on top of the sawdust. In the subsequent years, leagues were set up throughout both the summer and winter seasons. Lawn tennis, association football, rifle shooting, baseball and basketball dominated the summer schedule. Yukon or Klondike championships aside, trophies competed for included the Mayor McDonald Medal; the NWMP rifle trophy; the Oak Hall Clothing Company Cup; the Jersey Cream Trophy; the Cameron Buttons, donated by the Bank of Commerce; and the Commissioner Congdon Medal.³¹

Two events epitomize the ramifications of these organizational processes structuring the field of sports. In January 1905, a challenge issued from the DAAA to the Ottawa Hockey Club for a best-

of-three play-off for the Stanley Cup, then held by Ottawa.³² The challenge was accepted after intervention by Joe Boyle of Ottawa (who had been one of the founding directors of the DAAA some two years prior).³³ After a number of preliminary games, players drawn from the four teams participating in the league that season, were selected to represent the Klondike,³⁴ but the local sporting press were none too pleased with the team's level of competency: "... as compared with the hockey played two years ago this winter it was a cart-horse would be to Lou Dillon."³⁵ These premonitions were to be only too true. On 16 December, the team left by dog team (for all practical intents and purposes, on foot) for Whitehorse, some 300 miles south of Dawson, in order "to toughen up and be in some kind of shape upon ... arrival."³⁶ Two games for the Stanley Cup were played in Ottawa in January 1905. The Klondike team lost 9:2 and 25:2,³⁷ inducing the *Toronto Telegram* to comment that "an all-star cast ... [had played] against a lot of burlesquers."³⁸ During an eastern tour lasting well into April, the Klondike team played in a number of cities, including Montreal, Pittsburgh, Cape Breton, and Brandon.

The fight for the middle weight world boxing championship between Jack O'Brien and Jack 'Twin' Sullivan, staged in May 1905, was an event of comparable significance. The 'Twin' won by k.o. in the 11th round,³⁹ but it is almost certain that the fight had been fixed.⁴⁰ A rematch scheduled for 8 August was cancelled,⁴¹ but these events demonstrated that the system of sports of Dawson could successfully be integrated into the national system, such a it was, at its highest level. Dawson had been able to attract some of the reputedly best boxers on the continent; likewise, the Klondike Nuggets hockey team, although badly outplayed, had proven themselves capable of mounting a challenge to the leading hockey team in the country. The *Klondike Nuggets* hockey team, as the *Yukon World* viewed the implications, had been "one of the best drawing-cards that ever toured Canada in the interest of amateur sport."⁴²

That the Tlingit, Han and Gwich'in have not been mentioned anywhere in the preceding passage, is an indicator of the degree of normalization, and thus self-identity, achieved by the sports system of Dawson under the leadership of the DAAA, after the turn of the century. Normalization through the establishment of sporting organizations, as Hardy demonstrates in the context of Boston sports clubs for the same time period,⁴³ created group identity and stability through inclusion—which for the Klondikers was particularly necessary in order to counter the vacillations of their communal life. As early as 1901, the *Klondike Nugget* had editorialized on the importance of 'athletics' as a medium for the reproduction and expression of local identity, and concluded: "The athletic movement is a natural outgrowth of Dawson's development along commercial and social lines..."⁴⁴ To merely note the—obvious—exclusion of Native people from the Dawson sporting scene as logically complementary to inclusion and the production of self-identity, however, foreshortens the argument. Dawson's 'frontier' position required some degree of mediation of the Native presence, especially so since in their capacity as provision hunters, Han and Gwich'in had come to be accepted and necessary partners in trade. A process of continual dissociation—of inclusion by der-

ogation—rather than rigid exclusion occurred which derived its signifying force from events not themselves located in the sporting domain proper. Empire Day, Dominion Day, and Independence Day festivities produced significations which refocused the meaning of the sporting events which were part of the proceedings, from exclusion to dissociation, a change, which in its own peculiar way constituted one more temporary stabilizing force through its domestication of the 'far side' of the frontier.

4. Mediation: Special Events

The main characteristic of Empire, Dominion, or Independence Day celebrations was the production of sentiments of national identity. In the first few years, the proceedings focussed more on July 4 than on May 24 or July 1, because the majority of stampeder had come from the United States. Thus from year to year, the theme might be joint celebration and US-Canadian friendship (the festivities in 1903, 1904, and 1906 celebrated US-Canadian unity);⁴⁵ or friendly competition in the display of nationalistic ardor (the dominant theme of joint celebrations in 1905).⁴⁶ Sports and recreational activities, which made up a major part of the proceedings, were frequently framed in corresponding terms. Festivities of Independence Day 1900 were preceded by an invitation to "all Australians in the Yukon to form a team for the announced tug-of-war."⁴⁷ An international baseball game, Dawson vs. Eagle (Alaska), was staged on Independence Day 1904,⁴⁸ and Dominion Day of that same year was marked by a rugby match between a Canadian and a Scottish team.⁴⁹ An association football game was played between an Irish and a Scottish side on St. Patrick's Day 1905.⁵⁰

Native people entered the proceedings sometimes as clowns,⁵¹ often as participants in pie or bun-eating contests; no such events were organized for non-Native competitors. When Chief Silas of Moosehide demanded that two of his men be allowed to take part in the regular running races during Victoria Day 1901 celebrations (on the basis of the athletically sound argument that they could "outrun any white man in the country at any distance"⁵²), the two men were allowed to do so, but in a separate race without non-Native participants. "Siwash" and "squaw" races, i.e., separate races for Native men and women respectively, then became a regular feature of the proceedings.⁵³ Cultural and racist separation was maintained and reproduced even within the context of an athletic competition ostensibly open to everybody. As far as the Stampeder were concerned, these forms of participation, apart from creating hilarity all round, incorporated Native people in the proceedings in a position of dissociation qua representational inferiority, by relegating Native participants to either the side of pageantry or of the ridiculous, but they did not exclude them.⁵⁴

Thus even by 1915, when Dawson had lost most of the early goldrush vitality, the old stereotypical notions were alive and well. A group of Gwich'in arrived in town in early July and challenged the local contingent of the RCMP to a soccer match. "The Indians are the champions of the Arctic Coast and the Mackenzie River District, and never have been beaten," advised the *Dawson Daily*

News. "They have walloped the whites, the Eskimos, the Yellow Knives, the Dogribs, the Beavers, the Slavies, the Loucheux [i.e., themselves!], and Steffanson's white Eskimo, and expect to make short work of Dawson's best."⁵⁵ The challenge was accepted, and two games were arranged, one with a traditional Gwich'in mooseskin ball, the other with a regulation football. Reporting on the "great kickfest,"⁵⁶ the *Daily News* listed the line-up of the Gwich'in team, correctly beginning with non-fictitious names (John Martin, James Njootli, James Bonnetplume, names which to this day are well-remembered in Fort McPherson), but ending in characteristically stereotypical fashion: "... the Old Mukluk ... Tail Feather and Camp Robber."⁵⁷ The RCMP side reacted in kind, fielding among others: "... Waltzing Bull Turnbull, Prickly Porcupine Viner ... Tango Trail Oldham."⁵⁸ The Gwich'in lost the first match 3-2, but they proved to be tough opponents: "The game was fast and furious from start to finish ... the first half was played with the native ball, made of moose hide stuffed with caribou hair ... the second half was to have been played with a regular ball, but after a few minutes the Indians asked for their own ball back, and the game was completed with it."⁵⁹ The second match was held some days later, and the Gwich'in team emerged with a 2-1 win. "During the tense moments of the struggle, whites and tans were a heterogeneous mass,"⁶⁰ noted the *Daily News* correspondent.

5. The Dawson Boys

Despite the clear undercurrent of derogation of their culture displayed during these events, the Native people had no hesitations of attending pie-eating contests and enjoying kickfests. The undercurrent of derogation and ridicule of the proceedings was lost on neither Han nor Gwich'in nor Tutchone, but, having the ambiguity of no frontier to negotiate through the invocation of such stereotypes, because they were at home where Dominion Day was celebrated at Dawson, they could take part for the sheer excitement of the festivities: "During July, people travelled to Dawson City, for games and sports ... the white people used to enjoy the games they used to play. They would laugh, shout, and make a racket. It was almost like the Indians playing their games."⁶¹ They dissociated themselves in their own ways, simply leaving for the bush when the fun had come to an end.

Gwich'in thus participated in the sports and recreations of the frontier community from a position of marginality which they in part assumed of their own choosing, but which was by and large defined by the structure of the field of sport in Dawson City. Institutionalization and regularization of the system of sports were aspects of the normalization of a frontier located in what for the newcomers was an inhospitable and forbidding environment. The process of normalization implied an habitual exclusion of Native athletes who were barred from participation in the regular competitions even when their athletic competencies—that is to say, the amount of physical capital at their disposal—should have entitled them to participate. Likewise, they entered contests which were held during 'special events' from projected positions of cultural inferiority. Whatever images the

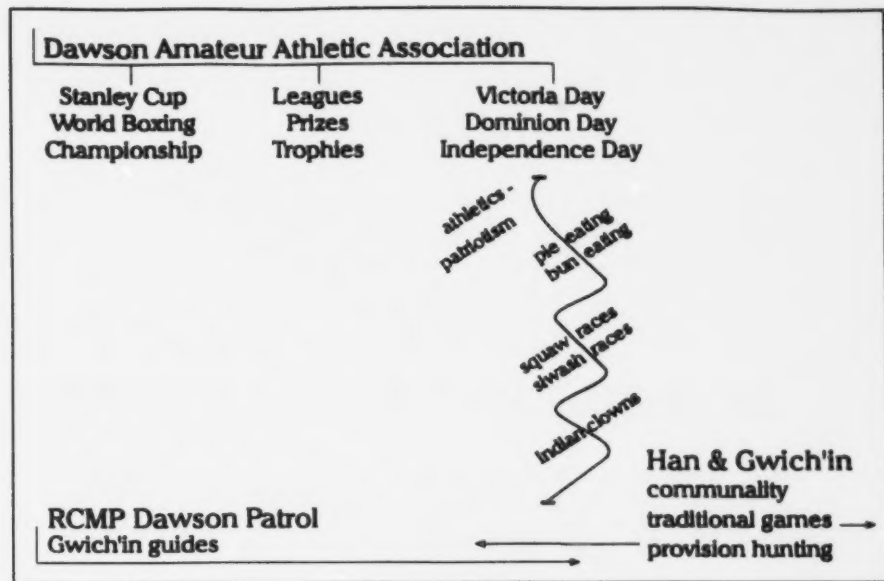


Figure 9 The Space of Sports and Games of the Goldrush Frontier
Elements of Signification

spectacle of bun- and pie-devouring Natives may have corroborated for the stampeders, participation in these events created no ambiguity for Han and Gwich'in, because they could not possibly have perceived in their own role an appropriate representation of their culture. The one thing the distributional properties of the field of subsistence production, and the structures of competition—few as they traditionally were—did not encompass, was a contest over *food*. Sharing and communality, it will be remembered was a fundamental value of contact-traditional Gwich'in society.

Yet the derogation underneath the fun, and the almost total displacement of the Han who became marginalized in their home country, was not lost on the Gwich'in. One of the more important outcomes of the Dawson interlude was that when the city finally lost its attraction for the Gwich'in—the trips diminished in frequency around 1915⁶² and came to an end in the late 1930s—the 'Dawson boys' emerged as a conservative force in Fort McPherson, emphasizing the traditional way of life in the face of the first indication of pressure and displacement encroaching from the south.

Endnotes

- 1 The discovery was made by Skookum Jim, Dawson Charlie, and George Carmacks. Dawson Charlie is frequently referred to by the incorrect name 'Tagish Charlie' (see, Julie Cruikshank, *Dän Däh Ts'edeninsh'é. Reading Voices*, pp. 121-135); see also, Catherine McClellan et al., *Part of the Land, Part of the Water*, pp. 82-84.
- 2 Morris Zaslow, *Opening of the Canadian North*, p. 103 ff.; see James McGregor, *Klondike Gold Rush*.
- 3 *Yukon Sun*, 8 May 1900.
- 4 CGLP, L43/1, Abraham Alexie, *When I Was a Boy*. The first visit to Dawson by Gwich'in Indians most likely occurred in the winter of 1899-1900 (*Klondike Nugget*, 24 December 1900; Richard Martin in, Richard Slobodin, "The 'Dawson Boys'," p. 33).
- 5 Ken Coates, *Best Left as Indians*, pp. 32-86; see also, Morris Zaslow, *Opening of the Canadian North*, pp. 125, 145.
- 6 Gwich'in leader Amos Njootli in the *Dawson Daily News*, 28 December 1907; CGLP, L41/1, Johnny Semple, *Reminiscences*, #1.
- 7 Richard Slobodin, "The Dawson Boys."
- 8 CGLP, L45/-, Andrew Kunnizzi, *A Long Time Ago: Hart and Blackstone River*.
- 9 PAC, MG17/B2, Bompas to CMS, 4 May 1898; see, Ken Coates, *Best Left as Indians*, p. 83 ff. Zaslow's evaluation of these developments is tolerably sanguine: "In establishing the permanent community of the Yukon it had been necessary to set aside the pre-existing Indian society..." (*Opening of the Canadian North*, p. 135). See also, GSA, M71/5/1C/28/2, I.O.Stringer, *The Church of England in the Yukon*, p. 5.
- 10 For an overview see, Melody Webb, *Yukon. The Last Frontier*, pp. 77-142.
- 11 E. Tappan Adney, *Klondike Stampede*, p. 336.
- 12 "In those days people didn't know anything about money. The Dawson gold rush was discovered and hundreds of white people came down this river... They hired the people from around here to help them get over the Rat River Pass. Whatever they worked for—they looked for tobacco and ammunition. If they gave money to the people, the people just laughed and threw it away. They wanted grub, not money. Some of them got disappointed and then quit and walked back to Fort McPherson" (CGLP, L4/10, Lucy Vaneltsi, *Traditional Life*, #2).
- 13 See, Ken Coates, *Best Left as Indians*, p. 80 ff.
- 14 *Dawson Daily News*, 9 October 1901.
- 15 A.C. Field in *Dawson Daily News*, 17 August 1918.
- 16 CGLP, L1/2, James Simon, *Working on a Steamboat*.
- 17 E. Tappan Adney, *Klondike Stampede*, pp. 180, 426.
- 18 *Dawson Daily News*, 27 March 1911.
- 19 Richard Slobodin, "The Dawson Boys."
- 20 E. Tappan Adney, *Klondike Stampede*, p. 426.
- 21 E. Tappan Adney, *Klondike Stampede*, p. 426.
- 22 E. Tappan Adney, *Klondike Stampede*, p. 427.
- 23 Ken Coates, *Best Left as Indians*, p. 39.
- 24 *Yukon Sun*, 8 May 1900, reporting results of the census of 1900.
- 25 Coates, referring to the *Census 1901*, gives a figure of over 24,000 for 1901 (*Best Left as Indians*, p. 39, note 26).
- 26 See, e.g., *Klondike Nugget*, 7 October 1902.
- 27 *Klondike Nugget*, 12 May 1900.
- 28 *Klondike Nugget*, 12 September 1902.
- 29 *Klondike Nugget*, 25 November 1902.
- 30 *Klondike Nugget*, 24 November 1902.
- 31 *Yukon World*, 23 April 1905; 27 August 1904; 20 April 1905; 5 January 1905; 24 February 1905; 15 July 1904.
- 32 The adventures of the 'Klondike Nuggets' are recounted in a recently published semi-fictional account; see, Don Reddick, *Dawson City Seven*.
- 33 *Yukon World*, 12 October 1904.

- 34 *Yukon World*, 25 November 1904. A group of 13 Gwich'in arrived in town on one of their trading excursions in the same week the selection games were held (*Yukon World*, 23 November 1904).
- 35 *Yukon World*, 26 November 1904.
- 36 *Yukon World*, 5 January 1904.
- 37 *Yukon World*, 13 January 1905, 16 January 1905.
- 38 *Toronto Telegram*, 16 January 1905.
- 39 *Yukon World*, 24 May 1905.
- 40 Terry Jackson, personal communication.
- 41 *Yukon World*, 5 August 1905. The DAAA incurred a financial loss which almost led to its demise.
- 42 *Yukon World*, 12 October 1904.
- 43 Stephen Hardy, *How Boston Played the Game*, esp. p. 127 ff.
- 44 *Klondike Nugget*, 16 May 1901.
- 45 *Dawson Daily News*, 6 July 1903; *Yukon World*, 23 June 1904; *Dawson Daily News*, 5 July 1906.
- 46 *Yukon World*, 5 July 1905.
- 47 *Klondike Nugget*, 24 June 1900.
- 48 *Yukon World*, 24 June 1904.
- 49 *Yukon World*, 3 July 1904.
- 50 *Yukon World*, 16 March 1905. The lavishness of the sports events peaked in 1905, when the most extensive program of sports ever was arranged for the Victoria Day celebrations (*Yukon World*, 24 May 1905). It was only a few months later that the DAAA encountered financial difficulties which were related to the cancellation of the Sullivan-O'Brien boxing rematch, and also to the fact that the population base of Dawson gradually began to dwindle below the threshold required to maintain a facility the size of the DAAA Gymnasium.
- 51 Festivities for Independence Day 1904 (*Dawson Daily News*, 2 July 1904). Beginning with the festivities for the year 1900, 'Indian pie and bun-eating' contests came to be a regular part of the proceedings.
- 52 *Klondike Nugget*, 6 July 1901.
- 53 See, e.g., *Yukon World*, 20 May 1904.
- 54 The exhibits for an 'agricultural fair' planned for August 1904 were listed in this order: "Ladies' fancy work—flowers and plants—minerals—Indian curios—fossils, mounted birds..." (*Yukon World*, 17 August 1904).
- 55 *Dawson Daily News*, 9 July 1915.
- 56 *Dawson Daily News*, 14 July 1915.
- 57 *Dawson Daily News*, 9 July 1915.
- 58 *Dawson Daily News*, 14 July 1915.
- 59 *Dawson Daily News*, 10 July 1915.
- 60 *Dawson Daily News*, 14 July 1915.
- 61 CGLP, L27/15-16, Sarah Peters, *The Way the People Used to Live*. LP, CGLP, L27/-, Sarah Peters, 1909—*How People Lived Between Peel River and Dawson*.
- 62 Richard Slobodin, "Dawson Boys," p. 29.

CHAPTER 7

HAY RIVER MISSION SCHOOL

The majority, however, are discharged from school at about the age of 14, entirely unaccustomed to the native way of life, used to routine and the highest order of cleanliness, and return to their homes completely lost ...

— S.J. Bailey, School Inspector, 1950

The experiment justified itself, for tourists told us that they could at once pick out the homes of our girls by the general tidiness and cleanliness both inside and outside, where they lived.

— Alfred J. Vale, Principal, 1955

The turn of the century marked an important break in Teetł'it Gwich'in history. Archdeacon McDonald retired in 1904, after almost forty years of missionary work, and moved to Winnipeg. Only a few years earlier, the Klondikers travelling to the gold fields via Rat and Wind Rivers had drawn attention to the urbanization developing on the far southern boundary of Gwich'in country. Many Gwich'in began to orient their annual movements towards Dawson, arriving on their first visit in the winter of 1900.¹ Not much later than two years after that visit, a new institution located in the distant south-east began to attract a quite different segment of the population. For over three decades, Gwich'in parents sent their children to the boarding school established by the Church Missionary Society at Hay River in 1894. The first 'Hay River scholars,' as they came to be called by the missionaries in Fort McPherson, commenced their studies in the fall of 1902. By the end of 1935, 172 children from Fort McPherson had spent periods of varying length at St. Peter's mission school.²

1. A 'Total Institution'

The mission school, built in the vicinity of the Hay River trading post on the south shore of Great Slave Lake, was located at a distance of almost 2500km from Fort McPherson. The HBCo steamship making its annual summer run down the Mackenzie provided the only link between the two

places during the year. For Gwich'in parents, even this single opportunity to contact their children or to examine the work of schooling, was not available for several decades, because they did not have the money to obtain passage to Hay River.³

The children's complete separation from the context of familial education left unchallenged the authority exerted by the missionaries in the inculcation of what from the point of view of the traditional culture amounted to a radically different cultural arbitrary. The reason for locating the school at Hay River had ostensibly been a technical one; a reliable food supply could not have been guaranteed under the seasonal uncertainties faced by the hunting economies of the far north, and the mission school soon developed into a sustained agricultural institution. The complete separation of the children from the traditional educational environment was a secondary, but intended, effect of these considerations. Principal Vale showed himself to be well aware of this, when, concerning one mother's intention to spend the winter of 1912-13 at the school, he advised his superiors: "I hope you will not encourage parents to reside near school as it adds greatly to our difficulty in the School discipline and work." Two days later, Lucas replied that he had "discouraged the proposed visit very strongly."⁴ Reverend Marsh was more straightforward in acknowledging the educational strategy involved, arguing that the children were "disposed to be more teachable and less difficult to manage ... when they [were] entirely removed from all intercourse with their relatives."⁵ A considerable number of the children stayed at Hay River for periods of up to eight years without any contact with their families, the letters which were delivered by the HBCo steamer excepted. Old-timers in Fort McPherson remember the mail delivery as a time of heightened expectations, but also of anxiety. Several children died at the mission school,⁶ and it was never quite clear what was to be expected when the letters arrived.

This destruction of the context of familial education constituted symbolic violence in a double sense. The cultural arbitrary, and the dispositions inculcated at the school, differed from the traditional system in that the latter was simply excluded in its totality. This occurred by intent as much as by default, because the personnel of the school remained by and large ignorant about contact-traditional Gwich'in culture. The inculcation of the new cultural arbitrary, secondly, constituted symbolic violence in respect of the delegation of educational authority. This has puzzled me a great deal, and I have been unable to arrive at a definitive understanding of what motivated the parents to be accessory to this. The cultural configuration of the contact-traditional phase had at the turn of the century reached its final stage, but, in its connection to the land, had not yet lost its vitality and its capacity for self-reproduction, not least in the field of education. Fort McPherson as yet amounted to not much more than the mission and trade installations, and the lure of life in town, or the perceived necessity to prepare for such through formal education, cannot have been very pronounced—an orientation towards the land was still at the basis of even the then firmly entrenched dependence on commercial trapping, and fur prices throughout the period remained reliably stable, extending the viability of the contact-traditional economy. It also soon became evi-

dent that the school did do little to prepare the children for the practical requirements of the hunting and trapping economy, repeated claims to the contrary in the school's frequent reports notwithstanding. It is clear that the Hudson's Bay personnel and the families of the Christian leaders played an important role in the reorientation towards Hay River, and it is they who probably induced other parents to follow suit.

Whatever the motivations may have been, the way had been cleared for the inculcation of a very different cultural arbitrary based on a fundamentally different mode of imposition. It created in many of those who had attended the school an acceptance of the specific forms of educational authority exerted by the personnel of the school, and of the forms of social capital embodied by and reproduced through, the school; they sent their own children to Hay River as well. To the extent that educational and enculturative work carried out at St. Peter's, rather than on the land, inculcated the principles of a distinctly different symbolic structuration of the social world, it also created the basis for the habituated acceptance of its own authority, in particular the de-localized authority of educational experts removed from the context of familial education, frequent acts of resistance to such authority notwithstanding: By the 1920s, parents in Fort McPherson began to petition the government for the establishment of a school in the community. Education had been transformed into a relatively autonomous field.

1.1. Intentions of the Work of Schooling

The goals pursued by the Anglican Church through the school at Hay River were initially as specific in their concern with inculcating the proper religious habitus as they were diffuse with regard to any further educational objective. "Teaching to them must be elementary. One object is to initiate them into the practical duty of prayer. Teaching cannot be too practical, faith should become a habit, and not merely a theory."⁷ In order to effect the conversion to Christianity, it was necessary to "root out old customs and beliefs"⁸ and to elevate the Native people out of their state of "darkness of ignorance and superstition."⁹ The acculturative intent expressed by such discourse was clear enough to behold, but the missionaries also attempted to prepare the children for the practical requirements of life after school. The contents of such instruction remained initially undetermined, and Principal Marsh's definition of the objectives of practical education in the 1906 report was somewhat vague: "We have no stated industries, but we aim to teach each child that comes under our care to be thorough, industrious and practically useful."¹⁰ By 1915, the school had become so large that economic self-reproduction was a major concern of daily life. The justification for the thrust of practical instruction was adapted correspondingly, because the school would have ceased functioning without the children's work in the farm operation. The curriculum was by then reminiscent of that of an industrial school, and the 'practical industries' taught were largely shaped by the immediate contingencies of economic self-reproduction. The paradox emerged that what essentially now was an industrial school which secured its food staples through an extensive farming (and fishing) operation, was to prepare its students for the practical exigencies of a northern

subsistence and trapping economy, but could only do so through instruction in the field of farming. This had important consequences for the character of educational work at the school.

2. The Work of Schooling

In contrast to the indirect nature of educational work in the traditional environment which provided a great deal of latitude for self-initiated and self-directed learning based on observation and imitation, the daily life of students at the mission school was rigidly controlled and organized. Significations of space and of time; the practical importance of the division of gender; the construction of a new distinction between work and 'leisure;' and the fundamental distinction between farming and hunting were redefined in the imposition of a cultural arbitrary, which, as novel as it was for the Gwich'in, was no more than the attempted "hetero-transplantation"¹¹ of an environment familiar to the missionaries, into the north. It would require a separate study to examine the ways in which the missionaries normalized an unfamiliar environment by 'transplanting' a familiar symbolism of space onto an often stressful and forbidding landscape, and I will limit myself to a brief exposition of some examples (it will be shown subsequently that a similar process occurred in the field of sports and games). This was a symbolic economy of adaptation. Missionaries "went in" to spread the gospel, and they were "out in civilization" on furlough.¹² After a prolonged tour of duty at Rampart House, missionary Canham left for the south. He was accompanied by his wife, who, finally arriving at San Francisco, felt "unable to describe our feelings at finding ourselves once more in civilization, it seemed like coming into a new world...."¹³ Reverend Marsh at the mission school in Hay River, likewise, sought to "beautify our surroundings as much as possible with them [flowers] ... in that way the charms and joys of the more highly favored parts of our father-land are kept green and sacred in our memories."¹⁴ The contents of educational work was determined by the missionaries' attempts to achieve a normalization of their environs as much as by explicitly formulated educational objectives (other than in the field of religion). The educators at Hay River mission school taught as they knew how, such that in the imposition of a normalized educational practice they demarcated out, *inter alia*, a specific space for purposes of 'play.' There was nothing to suggest that such a demarcation in any way furthered or impeded educational progress, yet the missionaries were forever renewing the fences around the school's playgrounds. They had habituated exigencies to comply with which were not those of the children of hunter-gatherers.

These brief examples are sufficient to circumscribe the structures of signification invoked in this familiarization of the northern landscape to the range of habituations of educators 'going in.' The domestication of space by means of flowers and fences, the regimentation of the body, and the regularization of time, constituted aspects of a cultural arbitrary, and of an educational authority, profoundly different from that of those contemporaries of the 'Hay River scholars' who grew up on the land—north of Dawson City, in the Blackstone Mountains, along Bonnetplume, Hart and Wind Rivers. These new structures of signification were also brought to bear on the field of games.

2.1. Daily Life at the School

In reminiscing on the organization of daily life at the mission school in the late 1920s, Mrs. Mabel Loutit explained: "We had to line up for everything. We had to line up for dinner, and even to go to church. We had to line up for everything."¹⁵ This was a persistent outward manifestation of the rigidity of organization and surveillance permeating every aspect of daily life. On a typical day, the children got up at six o'clock and, in separate rows for boys and girls, respectively, lined up for breakfast which moreoften than not consisted of porridge, "no sugar, no tea, cold water, a big slice of dried bread with molasses on it."¹⁶ After breakfast, chores such as procuring the day's water and wood supplies were carried out. School work began at nine o'clock in the morning. All children assembled in the school's only class room for instruction by the one certified teacher on staff. A lunch break was taken at noon time, school then resumed at one o'clock and lasted until four in the afternoon. After school, the children often went for a walk, boys and girls in separate groups, and usually different routes. The children walked in formation, two abreast, each group guided by a member of staff, "just like a string of dogs, and the supervisor yapping behind us."¹⁷ Supper was eaten at around six o'clock, followed by an evening service in the school room. "After that, we'd play around in the girls' room, and go to bed."¹⁸ The boys likewise had some time to play before going to bed. The day ended at around eight o'clock. This general schedule was adhered to with little variation throughout the existence of the school. One major change was made at some point before 1920; the amount of time spent in the class room was cut in half, in order to allow more time for the completion of the necessary economic chores. One group of children worked in the morning and went to school in the afternoon, while the other group followed the reverse schedule.

The rigid segmentation of time was mirrored in an equally pervasive gendered division of daily life. In strong contrast to the traditional form of education, which allowed boys and girls to interact freely until they reached the age of about eight or nine,¹⁹ the children at the school were rigidly segregated on the basis of gender throughout their stay at the school. Boys and girls occupied separate dormitories, they played in separate play rooms and play yards; they occupied separate parts of the hall at meals, in the class room and at church;²⁰ afternoon walks, as mentioned above, were taken in separate groups. At certain times, this rule was extended to indirectly regulate the supervisors' behavior as well: "That time, even the supervisors couldn't go out with their boyfriends, they had to take a couple of girls with them to chaperone them, and I always wanted to go."²¹ No visitor at the school was exempt from the regimentation. Mrs. Sarah Simon and her husband attended St. Peter's for two years in the late 1920. They had entered the school in the expectation of obtaining appropriate religious instruction, but found that they were "treated as children."²² They had to room in the boys' and girls' dormitories, respectively, and instead of receiving the expected instruction, they were for the most part put to work on domestic chores. "So James and I went there to learn, but we started working."²³ Principal Vale apparently had a quite different opinion of the reason for their stay, expecting that they had come "to learn the practical work of a home and

school."²⁴ The rigid discipline of the mission school allowed for no exceptions. As to the younger children at the school, such forcible separation served to obscure kinship connections even among brothers and sisters staying together at the school for extended periods of time. "They decided we should learn who our brothers [were] ... about once a month they put us in a room with our brothers. We stood there looking out the window, don't know what to talk about, don't look at each other."²⁵

The segmentation of time, and the gendered division of daily life was extended into an equally encompassing reconstruction of spatial significations, far removed from the valuations articulated through and expressed by 'travelling on the land.' The point can be understood best when the extensive farming operation supplying the school with food staples, is taken into consideration.

2.2. Farming at St. Peter's

The cycle of daily activities was divided into school work and work related to the economic self-reproduction of the school, and it was not always immediately apparent which of the two domains took precedence over the other. Vignette 7, an excerpt from the Daily Journal for 1915, indicates an emphasis necessarily placed on farm work which was so pronounced that, by 1924, Bishop Lucas displayed a certain inquietude as to the appropriateness of the strategy, writing to Crisall at Fort McPherson: "The question you ask re. the effect of too much work being given the boys at the school is a pertinent one. We both agree as to our personal thoughts on this subject, but if the boys come away from the school feeling that they have been subject to unreasonable drudgery, they are not likely to wish to see the place again."²⁶ Nonetheless, the importance of farming was on certain occasions, such as the "Harvest festival services" of 1931, reinforced at the symbolic level: "Church prettily decorated. Wheat, barley and oat sheaves from experimental patch. Also [decorated] with vegetables, etc."²⁷

Needless to say, the relationship to the land defined through farming activities differed significantly from that relationship as it was actualized in the context of the hunting economy. In addition to their regular work in the farming operation, the boys were given little plots for which they were made individually responsible. Such responsibility was expressed in terms of individual ownership by occasionally separating the plots, one from the next, by low fences. "After we got older ... the mission would give us a little piece of land, split that up between the older boys, and we grew our own garden. We plant[ed] potatoes and carrots ..."²⁸ The school invoked notions of individual responsibility for these plots in order to generate a certain degree of competitiveness and interpersonal comparison between the boys. By fall time, the relative quality of the boys' plots was evaluated, and the principal publicly recognized the best plot: "... who's got the best garden, gets a prize for that."²⁹ Principal Vale started just such a competition in June 1915, when a "prize was offered for the best kept garden this summer."³⁰ During summer and early fall, berry picking contests were held in which—by way of an inversion of the traditional gender division of labor which did not imply such competitive structures within the productive unit—the girls attempted to beat the boys:

3 May: Boys hauling ground with ox from the new school excavation to my house-yard.
 4 May: Same program as yesterday.
 6 May: Boys cutting potatoes again Levelling and filling up around the house done by school boys.
 7 May: After school self [Vale] & boys working at fence.
 10 May: ... boys planting potatoes, also cutting them and picking them from the cellar.
 11-15 May: Planting potatoes.
 17 May: Boys planted C. Norn's field today, this finishes the potatoe planting in just one week's time.
 18 May: All the potatoes were picked out of the cellars & the sprouts taken off and returned to cellars.
 19 May: School reopened today after the potatoe work.
 20 May: House-cleaning at mission
 24-29 May: ... regular visits to the nets.
 1 June: House-cleaning at the mission.
 5 June: ... prize for best-kept garden. ...
 14 September: Self and boys began to dig potatoes.
 15 September: Self and boys digging potatoes.
 16 September: ... boys and self went down and dug the potatoes & put them in the house.
 17 September: Self & boys at potatoes again.
 18 September: Boys & self dug the potatoes at the old Fort clearing.
 20 September: Again at the potatoes
 21-24 September: Working away at fields, went over them all a second time to get those missed in digging.
 — Journal of Events for 1915, St. Peter's Mission School, Hay River

Vignette 7 Hunters Into Farmers

'Self & boys at potatoes again'

"We always beat them ... in every way we tried to beat them."³¹ The abstracted, but concrete, measurement of comparative achievement was applied meticulously: "During the past week the children have been out nearly every day berry-picking, and there is great competition between the boys and girls. Up to the time of writing the boys have beaten the girls having brought home in all 256lbs, while the girls picked 182."³² The construction of a competitive economic field was complemented by constant indoctrination: "As a result of my sermon urging the children to work not only to the measure of the requirement, but to the measure of their ability, in God's service, ... one of the school boys asked to be allowed to work during his play-hours. His request was granted and he now cuts wood. We will buy it from him by the cord."³³

The appeal to religious responsibility was complemented by a pervasive system of rewards, gratifications, and implied or explicit punishments. I have already referred to farming prizes, but prizes were also used to regulate behavior and achievement orientation in the class room, "when the girls [were] pitted against the boys on review day."³⁴ By 1911, prizes were given out "for good behavior,"³⁵ and as a result of a competitive examination "on The Life of Christ, seven out of ten received prizes;"³⁶ three out of ten, one feels inclined to add, were not so fortunate. This strategy

12 May 1922: *Playground for girls being enlarged.*
 19 May 1922: *Levelling of playground for girls*
 5 June 1922: *Girls' playground fenced and now in use.*
 9 October 1922: *New entrance completed in girls' playroom.*
 22 October 1924: *C. Norn & self [Vale] at fence around girls' playground; using up the odd bits of wire fencing left around.*
 6 May 1932: *Mr. Farrow is building up the girls' play yard fence.*
 — Journal of Events 1922-1932
The yards are in a 'sorry' mess, but the boys and girls have begun to make their grounds look new and fresh again.
 — Journal of Events, 1 May 1929
Dimensions of New Building: ... Girls' Playroom: 17 x 15' — Boys' Playroom: 17 x 15'
 — Vale to Lucas, 1 January 1917

Vignette 8 Play in a Delimited Space

'Playground fenced and now in use'

was pursued until the mid-1930s, shortly before the closure of the school, and, as will be discussed below, was also extended into the field of sport and games.³⁷

What little hunting and trapping occurred at the mission school, was in various ways influenced by the structures of signification actualized within farming activities deriving meaning from interpersonal, comparative achievement. It was transformed into a peripheral, yet coveted, adjunct of daily farm work by the simple expedient of offering a hunting trip as a reward for achievement, that is to say, for diligent work in the potato patch. "School boys had a holiday hunt in woods as reward for good work at potatoes."³⁸ A similar reward, given in 1919, reflected the traditional division of labor, when the boys went "for a hunt this a.m.," while "the girls went for berries after dinner."³⁹ Further rewards were given in 1908 and 1916.⁴⁰ Work above and beyond the normal requirements sometimes achieved the same result: "Thomas before & after dinner finished the storm shelters over our kitchen door;" he was therefore "granted the privilege of going to see his traps on Saturday."⁴¹

The new distinction between work time and leisure time—expressed *inter alia* through placing hunting and trapping as peripheral activities into the latter domain—had its spatial analog in the demarcation of a space for play from the space of mundane activities, i.e., the construction of play grounds and playrooms, themselves in turn segregated by gender. The excerpts from the Journal of Events compiled in Vignette 8 indicate that the maintenance of this demarcation and its symbolic expression by fencing the play grounds in, was of continual concern to the educators at the school. The forms of interpersonal behavior permitted during play were delimited by posting special sets of rules in the play rooms and dormitories,⁴² but I have unfortunately not been able to locate a copy of these rules. An extension of this practical segmentation of space was provided by lockable boxes which had been installed for the children's use. In these, they kept the toys which were sent

to them periodically by members of the Women's Association. This served to introduce a subtle distinction between private and shared property. In forwarding a shipment of toys to Vale, Lucas included the stipulation that the "Jolly Boys should remain public property and not be locked in any one boy's box." A few weeks later, Vale reported that he had "introduced the Jolly Boy Dancer ... in honour of Miss Page's birthday. The children all enjoyed his dancing and trick jumping. He will certainly remain common property."⁴³

The rigid segmentation of time, and the practical segmentation of space; the distinction between different levels of achievement among the children by means of mechanisms of competition in the class room and the potato patch; and the spatial demarcation of 'play' from mundane activities necessarily influenced the position of the field of games and physical training.

3. Physical Training

Physical discipline in its most immediate sense was exerted in the form of corporal punishment. I have not been able to obtain consistent information on this topic, as the old people were reluctant to discuss it, but the few examples I found demonstrate that caning and 'thrashings' were regularly deployed educational devices. "If you did good, they were good to you. If you did bad, you got punished."⁴⁴ In 1922, one of the senior girls received a "thrashing" for being "the cause of much of the sauciness and disobedience among the younger girls."⁴⁵ My impression is that after Singleton succeeded Vale as Principal in 1927, recourse to this educational device increased in frequency. By 1930, according to Mrs. Loutit, "when the kids got in trouble they were sent over to his [Singleton's] office to get their spanking."⁴⁶ Mrs. Agnes Semmler likewise pointed out that physical punishment was a regular part of the educational work.⁴⁷ This strategy, however, was so far removed from the traditional educational procedures that it was met with solid resistance by those who were able to observe its effects, viz., the Slavey trading into Hay River. Finding that they could not approve of educational methods fundamentally at odds with a traditional approach discouraging physical punishment, they declined, for the duration of the school's existence, to place their children into the boarding school, only allowing some children to attend the day school intermittently. The Slavey parents, as Marsh saw the situation, made the regimen of physical punishment "the excuse for keeping them [the children] at home."⁴⁸ By the 1930s, the principal himself had begun to harbor doubts relative to the efficacy of the strategy; in musing that it had become "somewhat apparent that too much application of the strap is not the most effective means unto good of a true boy,"⁴⁹ Singleton indirectly acknowledged its pervasiveness.

A somewhat more mediated mode of intervention was maintained in the form of drills of various kinds. Many of these involved physical exercises, but educational achievement in other fields was considered to be the positive outcome of drills, as well. An Easter music performance met with general approval, because "the musical drill by the school children was very well done indeed."⁵⁰ The Christmas festivities 1931 featured, among other events, "... the boys' flag drill."⁵¹ The occa-



GSA, P7501/50



GSA, P7501/49

Illustration 8 Callisthenics at the Mission School

"... Dictation, Art and Physical Drill have been taught and visitors expressed much surprise [sic] on the products placed on view" — A.J. Vale, Report to DIA, 31 March 1922



Illustration 8 Calisthenics at the Mission School (continued)

GSA, P7501/52

sion turned out to be a success, "the children, being thoroughly trained, performed their part without a mistake."⁵² Christmas of 1928 was celebrated with "a girls' nightly drill with candles and song. Boys' flag drill and song...."⁵³ The application of drills and of mediated and unmediated corporal discipline were an extension of the extensive forms of control and regimentation implied by an educational theory which viewed children as trainable by rote. This was far removed from the self-directed and self-initiated learning of observation and imitation which constituted the basis for the development of bush consciousness.

Physical drills played an important role in this process. Often suffused with military connotations, they were a recurrent element of the field of games and sport. By 1909, a routine of weekly physical drills had been instituted.⁵⁴ One year later, "military drills, dumb bells & club swinging twice a week for 1 hour for all pupils over 6" were carried out (see Illustration 8).⁵⁵ Archdeacon Lucas, visiting the school on a tour of inspection, "expressed much pleasure after witnessing the children go through their Drill & Club swinging exercise."⁵⁶ These exercises were introduced as part of a calisthenics program, at the initiative of the Department of Indian Affairs, during the latter's initial, but indirect, involvement in northern education around 1910. The government agreed to provide funding to the churches for operating and maintenance expenses, books, and supplies. The churches, in turn, agreed to offer "an English education; to teach calisthenics [sic], physical drill; fire drill"⁵⁷ Three books on "physical training of pupils"⁵⁸ were forwarded, to be used for the calisthenics classes. Employment application forms for prospective workers contained a section inquiring into the candidate's "practice with regard to physical exercise ... and forms of recreation and amusement."⁵⁹ The teacher Mary Samwell—who during the early 1920s was the only educa-

When the newspaper man arrived the children were just in the act of getting ready for bed, the boys going through their final exercises of the day. It was a sight to be remembered. Twenty-five little black headed Eskimos and Indians, garbed in blue jumpers with white bands on collar and cuffs standing stiffly at 'attention' in their spotless bedroom, and at the word of command going through their drill with a snap worthy of the smartest Boy Scouts. H.C.M. Grant has charge of the boys, and from the joyous manner in which the youngsters went through their drill it is evident that he knows the boy mind. After having seen the natives in their squalid teepees the change was an amazing one, and it is not to be wondered at that many other native parents all over the far-flung north deem it the greatest privilege for their youngsters to be educated at Hay River ... all were bright and happy With the order 'Dismiss,' the boys paused for the correct two seconds, and then, as might be expected, made one concerted rush for the windows overlooking the river where their eager eyes drank in the unusual sight of the big white 'Distributor'

Then we left them to investigate the girls' dormitory, who after several loud knocks and a suitable pause, where found demurely in bed with the sheets pulled up to their noses. As with the boys, everything was spick and span

— Calgary Daily Herald, 25 November 1922

Vignette 9 Collective Body Symbolism

'Standing Stiffly at Attention'

tor holding a formal educational degree—held the Strathcona Physical Culture Certificate.⁶⁰ Physical drills were an element of the "classroom work" during the early 1920s,⁶¹ and this program was extended at some later point. Exercises for the girls were scheduled twice weekly, from four to five o'clock, and the boys went through daily drills of 45 minutes' duration.⁶² For some children, these sessions were a welcome relief from the unvarying routine of daily life: "Part of our school day, once a week or something, we went out into the yard, and we had some exercises I used to like that."⁶³

The drills and calisthenics exercises frequently exhibited a close affinity to military drills. Vignette 9, a passage from an article which appeared in the *Calgary Daily Herald* in 1922, dates to a time by which the calisthenics program had been in use for some years. The reference to military collective symbolism is inescapable. The founding of a boy scout patrol on 27 March 1915,⁶⁴ and a girl guide company some time prior to 1935⁶⁵ served to involve the children in the production of similar forms of collective symbolism. Analogous forms of organization were sometimes evident in the field of games proper, as well.

4. Games and Sports

The relational properties of the field of games and sports at the mission school were in the first instance defined by the fact that the traditional games and the elements of signification they provided, were completely absent from the inventory of activities. Sports, games, and physical training were a constant part of daily life at the school, but the activities introduced were those familiar to the missionaries and educators, not those which the children would have already been exposed to in their homes. The activities introduced as potential choices into the field by the missionaries, included the familiar Anglo-American sports. Baseball, basketball, and (association) football were



GSA, P7501/53



GSA, P7501/54

Illustration 9 Functional Uniforms: Students in Gym Suits, 1924

the preferred games of the warm season; after freeze-up and before the beginning of the cold season, skating was a popular activity. Athletic competitions such as the broad jump, running races, and also the bow and arrow shoot, were held frequently. These were the pragmatic games of 'muscular Christianity,' emphasizing the activities' utility for the children's physical health: "The pupils of the school are encouraged to take up any and all kinds of healthful sports and to play games in their hours of recreation, especially football, hockey, baseball, and boating."⁶⁶ The athletic games, however, were predominantly taken up by the boys rather than the girls. In a report to the DIA, Vale outlined the gendered division structuring the field of games and sport as follows: "Chief Games Boys: Football, tag, buttons and in season hockey, shinny, skating snaring rabbits, toy-boat sailing, angling for fish, shooting with bow & arrows, also older ones with the shot gun. ... Chief Games Girls: Swinging, skipping, playing with dolls, sliding, walks in the woods."⁶⁷

This divisions was temporarily bridged on the 'special occasion' which provided the distinctive elements of the school's yearly calendar, and as such constituted an important element of self-identity. "We had all kinds of sports, basketball, baseball, girls and boys all mixed up, having a good time, races, running races, everything,"⁶⁸ Mrs. Vivian Koe described the events which occurred on 'Founder's Day,' a sports day unique to St. Peter's.

4.1. Founder's Day

Founder's Day was instituted in 1908 to commemorate the birthday, on 18 June, of Tom Marsh, the school's founder. The day was "set apart as an annual holiday We indulged in games."⁶⁹ The event's primary purpose was to create a sense of belonging in the children, and thus to contribute to a sense of group identity connected to the school. From its inception, the main medium of signification for this purpose were sports, games, and athletic competitions. In this, Vale adhered to the traditions of the English public school system. The schedule of events followed a recurrent pattern through the three decades of the event's existence. The day was usually divided into two parts. The first, a 'social' part, consisted of a "picnic"⁷⁰ or a ride in the mission boat "up the [Hay] river."⁷¹ The second part of the day consisted of athletic competitions and various games.

The performance orientation produced in the various games and events ranged from playing just for fun, to more competitive events—usually the athletic disciplines—where an increased emphasis was placed on relative achievement and winning. In contrast to the outings and boat rides, which were organized for boys and girls in separate groups, the ball games often were engaged in by both boys and girls together. In 1918, the events of the day were "finished up ... with a ball game between the boys & girls."⁷² In 1923, games and races were held in the afternoon, sports and a football match were engaged in 1926, while in the subsequent, "races and jumping" were the order of the day.⁷³ Soccer matches, which were frequently a part of the proceedings, were engaged in by the boys only. Sometimes, a team from the mission school challenged a team of Slavey who were present to enjoy the proceedings. The athletic competitions consisted of running races, the bow and arrow shoot, and occasionally broad jump or high jump competitions. On Founder's Day

of 1934, Singleton added to the variety of the event by organizing a "costume obstacle race," and the events of that day were closed with a tennis tournament for the members of staff.⁷⁴ Founder's Day of the subsequent year brought further innovations. The customary competitions were staged after the separate boat rides for boys and girls, but they were complemented by "needle & thread, spoon & potatoe, three legged, relay, wheel barrow, obstacle races etc. ... Girls' boat ride at 7.30 pm; children's baseball; adults' baseball."⁷⁵

Founder's Day was held for the last time in 1936. The establishment of a new mission school in Aklavik had been authorized, and it was planned to convert the residential school in Hay River into a day school for the developing community. Singleton noted in the mission journal:

King's Birthday and Founder's Day sports. At 1.30 pm all the children got into the launch for a boat ride.

Sports in boys' play yard at 3 pm, all Indians [i.e., visiting Slavey] and adults having their turn both at racing and also archery. baseball at 8 pm for young and older children, then for adults ... later, tennis. This sports day is notable as being the last one to be held by the Hay River Res'd School running at full capacity. After this summer, only 16 children will be present. Next summer all the children except a possible few will depart homeward, when the main school building will be permanently closed.⁷⁶

On the very last occasion, the gendered segregation which had structured the social part of the event's proceedings since its inception, was finally abolished; boys and girls went on the same boat ride together.

4.2. The Performance Principle

The winners of the sporting competitions usually received prizes.⁷⁷ These were given for comparative athletic achievement, expressing an emphasis on the symbolic significance of winning (and losing). Children who during the competitions failed to display the anticipated competitive disposition, such as the boys during the "extensive sports ... held on river bank above the steamer yard" on Founder's Day of 1928, were considered to be "a little backward."⁷⁸ The important point to note is that the symbolic capital represented by these prizes acquired significance only in terms of the internal logic of the field of sports—as it was actualized on the occasion of Founder's Day; their signifying power was not directly linked to the 'occasion' proper, that is to say, to the persona of Reverend Marsh. The prizes constituted a symbolic index on the ostensible 'naturalness' of an interpersonal athletic competition which was mediated by no reference to something analogous to the 'circular challenge order' and the social arrangements of contact-traditional Gwich'in society expressed by the latter. What is more, the competitive structure of Gwich'in traditional games had been mediated by the articulation of the field of games with elements of co-operation structuring productive work in the subsistence economy. The physical capital circulating during Founder's Day athletic events was potentially convertible into symbolic capital only within the field of sports as such, into the prestige derived from superior athletic performance. It was not interconvertible in

a manner analogous to that which had linked the forms of physical and symbolic capital circulating in the field of traditional games, to the fields of subsistence production and of medicine power. In ascribing meaning to comparatively 'better' or comparatively 'inferior' achievement, athletic performance here produced self-referential significations. Sporting performance produced the evidence of its own symbolic significance. Examined in isolation, this observation apparently amounts to little more than a circular argument, but what needs to be considered is the distinctiveness of such performance from the structures of signification produced through traditional games. Sporting performance could produce self-referential significations, because unlike Gwich'in traditional games, it was neither embedded into the predominantly cooperative context of subsistence production, nor structured by rules equivalent to the 'circular challenge order.'

"Performance principle" is the term employed by Eichberg to denote this self-referential valorization of physical capital through interpersonal competition and comparative achievement (which constitutes the immanent principle bounding the field of contemporary sports).⁷⁹ The manifestation of this principle during the Founder's Day events at the mission school can be understood as an incipient stage in the development of the domain of sports and athletic competitions as a relative autonomous field with its own "objectively instituted possibles, traditions, rules ... [and] symbols."⁸⁰ In view of the pervasive, habituated acceptance of the performance principle in contemporary sports, this may appear to have been a transformation of little significance. In respect of the distributional properties of the field of Gwich'in traditional games, however, the practical logic of athletic performance articulated during Founder's Day events—and most all subsequent sporting competitions—offered a competing mode of involvement, and of production of significations, in particular concerning the relative significance of cooperation and competition, respectively.

This is not to suggest that the children participating in the Founder's Day festivities necessarily entered the competitions with the degree of determination and achievement orientation characteristic of participants in contemporary sports; Mrs. Vivian Koe's remark in fact indicates that the competitions did not necessarily imply the exclusion of fun: "We have all kinds of sports, basketball, baseball—girls and boys all mixed up, having a good time, races, running races, everything."⁸¹ Neither, however, did the fun imply the absence of the performance principle. Founder's Day events, as they were organized for the children by the missionaries and educators at the school, constituted an 'objectively instituted possible' derived from a sporting and cultural tradition principally at variance with the structures of signification of the traditional form (to which the event, in fact, made no reference at all).

Whatever the degree of competitive involvement exhibited by the children during the event, participation in the event produced an understanding of the possibility of a field of sports constituted by a practical logic of competitive athletic achievement. 'Sports Day,' an extension of Founder's Day at Fort McPherson subsequent to the closure of the mission school, articulated this understanding. Children who had been at St. Peter's, came to be regular participants in the event. The

dominant structures of signification produced during Founder's Day were related to athletic competitions, but the 'occasion' for the event's inception lay outside the field of sports itself. Sports Day, by contrast, produced analogous significations, but such production itself was the event's nominal occasion. Athletic competitions were its *raison d'être*.

5. Sports Day

Sports Day at Fort McPherson was the continuation of Founder's Day and Dominion Day events at Hay River; of the games and sports held at the annual summer trade meet on the Peel;⁸² and indirectly of Dominion Day and Independence Day festivities organized at Dawson City. At Hay River, sports competitions were not initially a part of Dominion Day proceedings, as the event was separated from Founder's Day by only two weeks. The day was typically marked by a "holiday [and] ... an outing;"⁸³ athletic competitions were not initially part of the program, although games were played occasionally. During the early years, the emphasis appears to have been placed on the 'social' rather than the 'athletic' aspects of the event. This changed in 1927 when Vale, during his last year as Principal of the school, made extensive "arrangements for the Diamond Jubilee of the Dominion of Canada."⁸⁴ This appears to have been one of the more elaborate sporting events held during the school's existence:

Dominion Day Jubilee of Confederation was celebrated by a Football match between Indians & a white pickup team. Score was 2 to 1 in favour of Indians. Afternoon & evening ran off a program of 30 events of which final was a canoe race. Indians had a dance & staff of Mission & police went down for a time, returning at midnight.⁸⁵

Games were organized for the events of the subsequent year, and "sports" were held on Dominion Day 1930; in 1931, "indoor baseball and tennis were enjoyed."⁸⁶ A further step in the synchronization of the two events was made in 1932, when the "sports day, usually connected with Founder's Day, was carried off in triumph," on Dominion rather than on Founder's Day; "... all the Indian population attended the sports. They also had representatives in the costume race, and in the archery competition."⁸⁷ When the last Sports Day was held at the mission school in 1940, it occurred on Dominion Day, not on Founder's Day. The latter was not held again after 1938, and sports and games had not been part of that year's event. According to Mrs. Vivian Koe who left the school in 1929, "on July 1, it was the same, too [as on Founder's Day]."⁸⁸

The school closed, the Gwich'in children returned to Fort McPherson and Aklavik, bringing with them not Founder's Day, but Sports Day. Sports Day, as it was staged in the late phase of the mission school's existence, did not differ significantly from the athletic events occurring during the annual trade meets, but when, subsequent to the cessation of steam ship traffic, the trade meets proper came to an end, Sports Day—unlike, for example, the hand game at Arctic Red River—persisted, no longer connected by necessity to an 'occasion' external to the field itself. Athletic com-

petitions could be engaged in according to the immanent logic of the field of sports, for the sake of athletic performance.

The events occurring during Sports Day at Fort McPherson followed by and large the same schedule as the sports and games of the trade meets. These have been described in a preceding section (see page 118). The categorical difference, however, resided in the fact that 'Sports Day' provided its own occasion, while the games played during the annual trade meets were embedded in the progression of the annual cycle, altered as it may already have been at that point. Evidence to this effect has been discussed above with regard to the different trajectories of *udzi* as opposed to the games of Sports Day.

6. Hay River to Aklavik

The effects of the mission school interlude on the position of the field of Gwich'in traditional games can now be summarized. Firstly, in a general sense, this episode led to an acceptance of the authority of educational institutions and experts de-localized from the context of familial education. Despite an undercurrent of unease on part of Gwich'in parents which surfaced throughout the period of St. Peter's existence,⁸⁹ many who had attended the school sent their own children to Hay River, as well.⁹⁰ The unease was caused by the distance separating Fort McPherson from Hay River and the concomittant lack of communciation rather than the exertion of educational authority outside the familial context. An active acceptance of such authority was indicated by the various petitions submitted by parents in Fort McPherson and Aklavik concerning the establishment of a school in the Mackenzie Delta. A discussion of such a prospect had been initiated at Aklavik as early as 1921,⁹¹ and during the summer of 1922, Inuit trading into Aklavik offered to erect a school building in the community; when Gwich'in parents were appraised of the proposal, they demanded that their children be sent to that school as well.⁹² Asked for his opinion on the matter, Whittaker advised Bishop Lucas that, out of concern for the continued existence of the school at Hay River, he "should not allow it."⁹³ In taking this position, he appeared to misrecognize the most important effect of the mission school episode, viz., the active acceptance of the principles of formalized education on part of Gwich'in educators—in temporary opposition to the opinion of even those, such as Lucas and Whittaker themselves, who had originally brought to bear those principles in direct antagonism to specific aspects of the traditional form of familial education. The first petition for the establishment of a school in Fort McPherson went out to the Department of Indian Affairs in 1926, a subsequent one, signed by residents of Aklavik and Fort McPherson, in 1929.⁹⁴ An Anglican boarding school was opened at Aklavik in 1936, and children from Fort McPherson began to attend by 1937.⁹⁵ It is worthwhile pointing out that such reliance on outside technical authority also affected the phase of reconstruction of the traditional games, which began some 30 years after the last traditional game had been played on the trail.

7. Summary

This acceptance by the Gwich'in, of an authority which they themselves had delegated, had several consequences with regard to the problem under discussion. Firstly, in the context of the mission school at Hay River, this resulted in the formation of a relatively autonomous field of sport, albeit in its incipient form. The field's practical logic was circumscribed by the 'performance principle,' that is to say, by the possibility to engage in competitive athletics, for the sake of physical performance. Physical capital came to be the dominant form of capital at stake in this field; the symbolic valorizations, such as the prizes to be won on Founder's Day, were directly linked to inferior and superior performance. Secondly, in petitioning for the establishment of a school in their community, the Gwich'in extended the range of effects of this development into their home territory, inasmuch as the organization of sports through the curriculum—until recently modelled on the Alberta curriculum—implied the expression of the same principle, and the delegation of authority to technical experts.

The field of traditional games, thirdly, was affected by these developments by virtue of its deviation from the performance principle structuring the field of sport. The traditional form, it will be remembered, contained a cooperative principle through its articulation with the subsistence economy, and the organizational form of the circular challenge order. There was no equivalent to the symbolic capital constituted by athletic prizes, in the traditional field. The imposition of the performance principle on part of the educators at the mission school occurred more in ignorance of the principles ordering the traditional form rather than their explicit rejection, but, by and large, the traditional games fell by the wayside.⁹⁶

In the end, these developments led to a gradual decrease of awareness of the traditional form. When I asked Mrs. Sarah Simon—who is now in her nineties, and lives within sight of Chief Julius school in Fort McPherson—for her view on these developments, she explained to me that she herself had grown up 'in town.' By the time she began to orient her life more towards the bush, "it [the traditional games] had all died out." She went on to talk about Sports Day which by then had become firmly associated with the development of the community, creating a further impediment to the development of an habituation towards games which had traditionally been played on the land.

At the same time, it will be remembered that most of the people oriented towards Dawson were not exposed to these particular developments, and most of these never attended school. A considerable amount of the information presented in Chapter 4 was provided by old-timers trading into Dawson City towards the close of the contact-traditional period. Furthermore, the parents of many children sent to Hay River followed the trapping cycle in the bush which still was characterized by a strong orientation to the land. Returning children were confronted with a life-style from which they had been separated for a number of years, but into which many of them were reintegrated, albeit with some difficulty. Many of the children returning to the north had to relearn the Gwich'in

language, and many of them had to be reintroduced into the practical problems of the trapping and hunting economy. It speaks to the enduring vitality of the culture at that time that this was done successfully in many—though not all—cases, up until the 1930s.⁹⁷ Many of the first group of children to attend the mission school reverted to their “old mode of living,”⁹⁸ Vale noted with a certain ruefulness. The old-time games fell into disuse, but elements of bush consciousness, expressed through sharing and an emphasis on cooperation, based on an enduring orientation towards the land, remained strong in other fields of the social space.

These simultaneous developments, i.e., the acceptance of the authority of de-localized experts in the construction of programs which were frequently at variance with core values of the traditional culture, and a persistent, though weakened influence of certain elements of bush consciousness, constituted the context within which the rediscovery of the traditional form occurred. An examination of these developments will conclude this study.

Endnotes

- 1 *Yukon Sun*, 20 March 1900.
- 2 PAC, MG9/G3/2, Journal of St. Matthew's Mission, pp. 160-188.
- 3 In 1911, for example, the fare per child amounted to "\$17.00 for meals, \$11.00 for passenger" (PAA, 70.387, MR 230/16, Lucas to Whittaker, 9 January 1911). The first trip by parents from Fort McPherson to the school apparently did not occur until 1923 (PAA, 70.387, MR 200/28, Crisall to Lucas, 1 February 1923). Parents who attempted to remove their children from the school prior to the end of the period which had been agreed upon, were asked to pay their children's passage. This, they were usually unable to afford (PAA, 70.387, MR200/80, Vale to Lucas, 25 January 1923).
- 4 PAA, 70.387, MR 231/14, Vale to Lucas, 3 August 1912; Lucas to Vale, 5 August 1912.
- 5 Tom Marsh, Annual Report 1906, Hay River Mission School, to DIA.
- 6 Between December 1924 and July 1935, at least 11 children from Fort McPherson died at the school.
- 7 PAA, 70.387, MR 4/3/9/6, Journal of Events, St. Peter's Mission School, 7 July 1929.
- 8 Bishop William Bompas, quoted in: Hiram Cody, *Apostle of the North*, p. 365.
- 9 Tom Marsh, Annual Report 1906, Hay River Mission School, to DIA. See, Robert Johns, "History of St. Peter's Mission."
- 10 Tom Marsh, Annual Report 1906, Hay River Mission School, to DIA.
- 11 I have borrowed this useful term from Vicky Paraschak (see, *Heterotransplantation of Organized Sport*).
- 12 GSA, M71/4/Series 2/1d, Hay River Mission School, General Correspondence of Principal, Vale to Miss Leon, 17 March 1920.
- 13 GSA, M56/2, Canham Collection, Charlotte Canham to Miss Large, September 1896.
- 14 Tom Marsh, Annual Report 1906, Hay River Mission School, to DIA.
- 15 Mabel Loutit, Interview with Robert Johns, "History of St. Peter's Mission," p. 30.
- 16 GLCC, OT46, Sarah Simon, Hay River School; see also, GLCC, OT78, Jim Koe, Hay River School.
- 17 GLCC, OT76, Agnes Semmler, Old-time Stories.
- 18 Mabel Loutit, Interview with Robert Johns, "History of St. Peter's Mission," p. 30; GLCC, OT76, Agnes Semmler, Old-Time Stories.
- 19 See, eg., CGLP, L48/5, George Vitrekwa, *Games Children Played*.
- 20 GLCC, OT46, Sarah Simon, Hay River School.
- 21 GLCC, OT76, Agnes Semmler, Old-Time Stories.
- 22 GLCC, OT46, Sarah Simon, Hay River School.
- 23 GLCC, OT46, Sarah Simon, Hay River School.
- 24 GSA, M71/4/Series 2/1k, Hay River Mission School, A.J. Vale's Notes and Manuscripts.
- 25 GLCC, OT76, Agnes Semmler, Old-Time Stories.
- 26 PAA, 70.387, MR200/28, Lucas to Crisall, 2 June 1924. Lucas' evaluation was probably quite correct. While some of the children had fond memories of their stay, the majority left with a negative impression.
- 27 PAA, 70.387, MR4/3/9/7, Journal of Events, St. Peter's Mission School, 19 October 1931.
- 28 GLCC, OT78, Jim Koe, Hay River School.
- 29 GLCC, OT78, Jim Koe, Hay River School.
- 30 PAA, 70.387, MR4/3/9/5, Journal of Events, St. Peter's Mission School, 5 June 1915.
- 31 GLCC, OT83, Vivian Koe, School Days.
- 32 GSA, M71/4/Series 2/1d, Vale to S.E. Forster, 19 September 1919.
- 33 PAA, 70.387, MR4/3/9/5, Journal of Events, St. Peter's Mission School, 21 February 1911.
- 34 GSA, M71/4/Series 2/1d, General Correspondence of Principal, Vale to E.G. Proune.
- 35 PAA, 70.387, MR4/3/9/5, Journal of Events, St. Peter's Mission School, 13 April 1911.
- 36 PAA, 70.387, MR200/76, Vale to Lucas, 11 August 1913.
- 37 PAA, 70.387, MR4/3/9/7-8, Journal of Events, St. Peter's Mission School, 2 July 1930, 16 April 1933.
- 38 PAA, 70.387, MR4/3/9/5, Journal of Events, St. Peter's Mission School, 30 September 1919.

- 39 PAA, 70.387, MR4/3/9/5, Journal of Events, St. Peter's Mission School, 3 May 1919.
- 40 PAA, 70.387, MR4/3/9/4-5, Journal of Events, St. Peter's Mission School, 28 May 1908, 13 May 1916, 9 August 1916.
- 41 PAA, 70.387, MR4/3/9/5, Journal of Events, St. Peter's Mission School, 17 November 1915, 20 November 1915.
- 42 PAA, 70.387, MR4/3/9/5-6, Journal of Events, St. Peter's Mission School, 25 November 1918, 25 October 1927.
- 43 PAA, 70.387, MR231/14, Lucas to Vale, 8 May 1912, Vale to Lucas, 31 August 1912.
- 44 GLCC, OT83, Vivian Koe, School Days.
- 45 PAA, 70.387, MR200/28, Bishop Lucas, Notes Taken during a Visit to St. Matthew's, 1 January 1922.
- 46 Mabel Loutit, Interview with Robert Johns, "History of St. Peter's Mission," p. 31.
- 47 GLCC, OT76, Agnes Semmler, Old-Time Stories.
- 48 Tom Marsh, Annual Report 1906, Hay River Mission School, to DIA. The situation had changed but little, 25 years later: "Principal strongly appealed for village children for the school today. Few of them are keen" (PAA, 70.387, MR4/3/9/7, Journal of Events, St. Peter's Mission School, 11 July 1931).
- 49 PAA, 70.387, MR4/3/9/6, Journal of Events, St. Peter's Mission School, 17 July 1929.
- 50 PAA, 70.387, MR4/3/9/6, Journal of Events, St. Peter's Mission School, 8 April 1917.
- 51 PAA, 70.387, MR4/3/9/7, Journal of Events, St. Peter's Mission School, 25 December 1931.
- 52 PAA, 70.387, MR4/3/9/7, Journal of Events, St. Peter's Mission School, 25 December 1931.
- 53 PAA, 70.387, MR4/3/9/6, Journal of Events, St. Peter's Mission School, 25 December 1928.
- 54 PAA, 70.387, MR4/3/9/4, Journal of Events, St. Peter's Mission School, 9 December 1909.
- 55 GSA, M71/4/Series 2/1c, Letterbooks, Vale to DIA, 26 July 1910.
- 56 PAA, 70.387, MR4/3/9/4, Journal of Events, St. Peter's Mission School, 14 March 1910.
- 57 Kerry Abel, *Drums Songs*, p. 182.
- 58 PAA, 70.387, MR231/15, Vale to Lucas, 11 July 1913.
- 59 PAA, 70.387, MR200/63, Application of Hugh Grant for Mission Work, 18 May 1921; Grant listed football and tennis as his preferred sports. I have unfortunately been unsuccessful in locating completed application forms.
- 60 GSA, M71/4/Series 2/1f, School and General Statistics, Principal's Report, 31 March 1921.
- 61 GSA, M71/4/Series 2/1d, General Correspondence of Principal, Principal's Report for Year Ending 31st March 1922; PAA, 70.387, MR200/72, Vale to D.C. Scott, 1 March 1922.
- 62 MR200/142, Samwell to Lucas, 10 December 1923.
- 63 GLCC, OT76, Agnes Semmler, Old-Time Stories.
- 64 GSA, M71/4/Series 2/1k, A.J. Vale's Notes and Manuscripts. Five of the six founding members came from Fort McPherson.
- 65 GSA, M71/4/Series 2/1i, Log Book of the First Hay River Guide Co, 1934-1936.
- 66 Tom Marsh, Annual Report 1906, Hay River Mission School, to DIA. More than 15 years later, Vale submitted a report of virtually identical contents (GSA, M71/4/Series 2/1d, Principal's Report for Fiscal Year Ending 31 March 1922).
- 67 GSA, M71/4/Series 2/1c, Vale to DIA, 26 July 1910.
- 68 Vivian Koe, School Days.
- 69 PAA, 70.387, MR4/3/9/4, Journal of Events, St. Peter's Mission School, 18 June 1908.
- 70 This occurred, for example, in 1915 (PAA, 70.387, MR4/3/9/5, Journal of Events, St. Peter's Mission School, 18 June 1915).
- 71 For example, PAA, 70.387, MR4/3/9/5-6, Journal of Events, St. Peter's Mission School, 18 June 1918, 18 June 1925.
- 72 PAA, 70.387, MR4/3/9/5, Journal of Events, St. Peter's Mission School, 18 June 1918.
- 73 PAA, 70.387, MR4/3/9/6, Journal of Events, St. Peter's Mission School, 18 June 1923, 18 June 1926, 18 June 1927.
- 74 PAA, 70.387, MR4/3/9/8, Journal of Events, St. Peter's Mission School, 16 June 1934.
- 75 PAA, 70.387, MR4/3/9/9, Journal of Events, St. Peter's Mission School, 29 June 1935.
- 76 PAA, 70.387, MR4/3/9/9, Journal of Events, St. Peter's Mission School, 23 June 1936.

- 77 GLCC, OT83, Vivian Koe, School Days; PAA, 70.387, MR4/3/9/5, Journal of St. Peter's Mission School, 18 June 1912.
- 78 PAA, 70.387, MR4/3/9/6, Journal of Events, St. Peter's Mission School, 18 June 1928.
- 79 Henning Eichberg, "Zur historisch-kulturellen Relativität des Leistens in Sport und Spiel;" idem, *Leistung, Spannung, Geschwindigkeit*.
- 80 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 208.
- 81 GLCC, OT83, Vivian Koe, School Days.
- 82 McDonald makes reference to Dominion Day festivities in his journal for 1895, but games do not appear to have been part of the event (YTA, MS 85/97, Robert McDonald, Journals, 1 July 1895).
- 83 For example, PAA, 70.387, MR4/3/9/5, Journal of Events, St. Peter's Mission School, 1 July 1919.
- 84 PAA, 70.387, MR4/3/9/6, Journal of Events, St. Peter's Mission School, 30 June 1927.
- 85 PAA, 70.387, MR4/3/9/6, Journal of Events, St. Peter's Mission School, 1 July 1927.
- 86 PAA, 70.387, MR4/3/9/6-7, Journal of Events, St. Peter's Mission School, 1 July 1928, 1 July 1930, 4 July 1931.
- 87 PAA, 70.387, MR4/3/9/7, Journal of Events, St. Peter's Mission School, 1 July 1932.
- 88 PAA, 70.387, MR4/3/9/14, Journal of Events, St. Peter's Mission School, 1 July 1940; GLCC, OT83, Vivian Koe, School Days.
- 89 See, for example, GSA, M74/5/3G/6, Stringer Papers, Charles E. Whittaker, Memorandum to Metropolitan Regarding Visitation of the Diocese of Mackenzie River, 1926; PAA, 70.387, MR200/44, Crisall to Lucas, 6 February 1922, MR200/28, Lucas to Crisall, 3 July 1923, MR200/28, Lucas to Crisall, 6 February 1924.
- 90 See, for example, GSA, M71/4/Series 2/1d, St. Peter's Mission School, General Correspondence of Principal, Matron in Charge to Mrs. Hunter, 1 December 1923; *ibid.*, Murdo Joodki to Vale, 20 August 1921; GSA, M74/5/3G/6, Stringer Papers, Charles E. Whittaker, Memorandum to Metropolitan Regarding Visitation of the Diocese of Mackenzie River, 1926; PAA, 70.387, MR200/44, Crisall to Lucas, 5 July 1925; PAA, 70.387, MR4/3/9/8, Journal of Events, St. Peter's Mission School, 22 July 1932;
- 91 PAA, 70.387, MR200/28, Crisall to Lucas, 3 August 1921.
- 92 PAC, RG10/vol 6476/file 919/1/part 1, Wood to Commissioner RCMP, 29 November 1922.
- 93 PAA, 70.387, MR200/160, Whittaker to Lucas, 9 January 1923. Three years later, Whittaker had changed his opinion; he now advocated "the Delta as the base of operations ..." (Whittaker to Bishop, 27 February 1927).
- 94 GSA, M74/5/3G/6, Stringer Papers, Charles E. Whittaker, Memorandum to Metropolitan Regarding Visitation of the Diocese of Mackenzie River, 1926; PAC, RG10/vol 6476/file 919/1/part 1, Petition to Establish an Anglican Boarding School, 29 June 1929.
- 95 PAC, RG10/vol 6476/file 919/1/part 1, P.W. Head, Extract from Journal Regarding Treaty Trip, 9 July 1937. The school was located in close proximity to the ratting areas in the Mackenzie Delta, and the end of the ratting season almost coincided with the end of the school year. Parents returning to Fort McPherson after the season would thus wait at Aklavik to take their children back with them.
- 96 The organizational format in which they were reactivated at the *Dene Games* festivals, some forty years later, was designed to accommodate the performance principle, but as will be examined in the subsequent chapter, an at least partial retention of 'bush consciousness' subverted the intended emphasis on comparative performance.
- 97 GLCC, OT92, Sarah Gardlund, School Days; CGLP, L20/3, Pascal Baptiste, *First Signing of Treaty*; CGLP, L52/1-3, Jim Koe, *A Long Time Ago*.
- 98 PAA, 70.387, MR200/72, Vale to H. Bury, Indian Schools Dept., 26 July 1916.

CHAPTER 8

CONTEMPORARY GAMES-FESTIVALS

*... this sort of thing can be kept up for sports,
or just to keep the tradition in the tribe.*

— Charles Koe

A late reference to traditional games played in what resembled the contact-traditional context mentions an encounter in the winter of 1939, when Victor Stewart of Fort McPherson, travelling by dog team between Aklavik and Old Crow, came across a large meat camp consisting of probably sixty tents. People from Aklavik, Old Crow and Fort McPherson had come together to 'make meat.' At times, when the people were not busy, some of the old-time games were played. Victor remembers Gwich'in swing and the stick pull to have been two of these. Even at that late point in time, the traditional games were still associated with life on the land. During the re-orientation towards community life which became distinctly more noticeable not long after that encounter, the old games fell by the wayside for a considerable period of time. The extension of the system of formalized education, concomitant with the move into town, made no reference to the traditional games until the late 1960s. When they finally began to attract some interest again, they had to contend with the practical logic of the field of modern sports, which was by then firmly entrenched.

1. A Community School

Victor Stewart's trip occurred during a time period when the developing community orientation gained increasing strength with the establishment of a day school in Fort McPherson. In the face of growing criticism of the quality of education at the Aklavik residential school,¹ and an increasing resistance by Gwich'in parents to send their children to yet another boarding school, a meeting was held at Chief Julius' house on 26 June 1939, during which the establishment of a day school in the community was discussed.² Several more years were to pass, however, before the resident Anglican missionary, the Reverend Dewdney established, on a trial basis, a part-time school at Fort McPherson in October 1945. A group of parents who lived permanently at the fort, expressed an interest in the establishment of a day school, and after several more parents had agreed to move into the community for the winter in order to make it possible for their children to attend school, an

application was submitted to the DIA for the establishment of a full-time day school. It is an indicator of the fundamental changes which had already occurred that Dewdney sought to demonstrate the proposal's strength by pointing out that all of the prospective students spoke "only English."³ By August 1946, Dewdney was able to present a list of 12 'non-treaty' and 13 'treaty' children who were to attend school.⁴ Construction of a school building was approved in March 1946. Abraham and Brian Francis, Fred Firth, and William Edward were hired as construction workers, and the school opened on 3 September 1946. Catherine Hershel was the teacher.⁵ In the first years of its operation, the school was predominantly attended by boys. The old Anglican mission house, which had been standing vacant for a number of years, was transformed into a temporary residence for the boys. Some of the girls continued to attend the residential school at Aklavik, as no hostel space could be found for them.

When, some years later, the discussion turned to the construction of a residence in the community, the idea was strongly supported by those parents who had remained in town for the sake of their children's school attendance. The construction of a residence would have made it possible for them to return to the bush again, while their children attended school in the community. This plan was realized in 1958;⁶ the construction of Fleming Hall made it possible for some of the parents to move back out onto the land. The hostel operated for over 15 years. With the decline of the commercial fur trade, the community orientation gained further significance. Trapping was no longer an economically viable enterprise, and many parents settled in town permanently. This reorientation was reinforced by a major phase of housing construction initiated by the federal government in the early 1970s. The relatively greater convenience of modern housing induced many people who basically had retained a bush orientation to finally move into town.⁷ To this day, though, some old-timers prefer a wood stove to the convenience of central heating, and some live in cabins at 'Eight Mile' on the Peel throughout the year.

The reminiscences of two long-time educators reproduced in Vignette 10 indicate that even during the late 1950s and early 1960s, when these developments gained momentum, certain aspects of bush consciousness, in particular the strong orientation to the land, were still evident, sometimes even within the classroom context of an urban high school. Many of the school children of the late 1940s and 1950s still had been exposed to life in the bush, for extended periods of time. They, in turn, were the parents of the first generation growing up predominantly in town, at Fleming Hall; "most people over 45 were born and raised in the bush and therefore they have had only a limited opportunity and / or need to attend school."⁸ This is a point of some significance, because this orientation towards the land and the concomitant aspects of bush consciousness are retained in a residual form to this very day, as can be observed during events such as the *Dene Games* or the *Northern Games*. The resultant ambivalent structures of signification produced during these events, oscillating between manifestations of bush consciousness and of the performance principle, will be discussed in a subsequent section.

I noticed the lack of enthusiasm many Grade 8 and 9 students had for formal education. It soon became apparent that the term 'education' included all the skills and knowledge a person acquired from all his/her life experiences. I began to see great knowledge and understanding of life and ways of earning a living that were very new to me, showing up in my students. No wonder there was apathy. We were asking students to learn, mainly by rote, a quantity of factual knowledge and some manipulative skills for which they had no felt need. We were trying to prepare them to accept and make a living at tasks which they knew nothing of and which they would not choose over traditional ways of life even once they had the basic knowledge and skills required. It seemed to me that we must treat these students like Adults. That is, we must give them the choice as to what they would study and how long they would continue in that study.

This presented real problems. How could we help an Indian or Eskimo child learn the rudiments of the hunting, fishing, trapping economy that most of our students were interested in following. Ours was, in fact, a northern school but we had only a southern curriculum as used in the Schools of Alberta. Ours was that bit of knowledge and academic skills that we considered essential to academic excellence for students anywhere in the world. ... But we could not teach the traditional ways of life of these people yet we did take them from their homes where these skills could be learned on the job at home, in the bush, on the trapline, or in the fish camp.

— Fred North, teacher and 2nd vice-principal, Sir Alexander Mackenzie High School, Inuvik, 1959-1960

I wanted more, and not only accounts of the white man's experiences. I longed to know what life had been like for the native before the coming of the white man. I had felt for some time that there was an artificiality in the way I was introducing learning to the native child. Necessarily limited by my own experience, I was teaching English Nursery Rhymes and Folk Tales to the little ones, but what was the significance of such whimsies as, 'Who has been eating my porridge?' or, 'What big teeth you have, grandmother!' to children who were familiar with the real habits of bears and wolves.

— Phyllis Taylor, teacher at Aklavik Anglican Residential School, 1951

Vignette 10 Bush Into Town

Hysteresis of bush consciousness

The cited passage also indicates that the social and cultural capital these pioneer educators brought with them was thoroughly unrelated to the extant conditions in the classroom.⁹ After perusing the extensive biographical and autobiographical data contained in the Macpherson collection (NwTA), I am inclined to think that the 'ineluctable necessity' of teaching English to the Dene, constantly propounded by the teachers moving into the north, was as much based in a concern for the self-reproduction of the forms of social and cultural capital they brought with them, as by a clearly defined necessity for the Native people to acquire such mastery. In the absence of English, not one of the teachers could have offered a course of study. As mentioned previously, a pervasive ignorance concerning the traditional games was a secondary manifestation of these circumstances. By the 1970s, when the institutionalized education system had acquired a certain degree of organizational stability, the necessity no longer appeared quite so urgent, and the curriculum underwent significant changes.

Fleming Hall closed in the late 1970s; it was torn down in 1980. The original school was replaced with a new building in the early 1950s. This building was enlarged in 1957 and 1958, and replaced in 1976. This school was named 'Chief Julius School' in 1978, and this is the present community school at Fort McPherson, offering grades K-9.¹⁰ The school has a gym which is used by all age groups and also by many groups from the community, after school hours. The use of the

gym is complemented by the facilities at the Annie G. Robert Recreation Centre and a hockey arena. A curling rink which had been constructed in the early 1990s, burned down. Curling is at present organized in the arena. An enclosed swimming pool was completed in 1993. The construction of these urban installations provided added incentives for people to take up permanent residence in town.

The creation of a town orientation initiated by the decline of commercial trapping; by direct government intervention which threatened to withhold support payments from parents of truant children; and the housing boom of the early 1970s, concluded a process which had its origin in the devastating effects of the great epidemic of 1928. The mobility which was at the core of pre-contact and contact-traditional culture, had been transformed into a by and large sedentary life-style. The introduction of the skidoo (snowmobile) during the 1960s and 1970s, accelerated this process. Although this technology increased the individual's mobility, it reduced the amount and quality of physical capital required to sustain that mobility.¹¹ During winter time, the bush is now accessible within the time span of a short skidoo ride (provided that the machine will not break down), which, although often extremely demanding because of the cold, does not require the kind of physical fitness which was the hallmark of the travellers of the old days. The young people, at any rate, prefer to race their skidoos in the vicinity of, and through, the community. They are more attracted by the speed of the device than by its possibility of opening for them a perspective on the land.¹²

1.1. A Cultural Arbitrary: Constructing the Curriculum

In theory, the early teaching followed the guidelines and contents established by the Alberta Curriculum, but no provisions had been made for the inclusion of games or physical education into the work of schooling. The layout of the first school building in Fort McPherson did not provide sufficient space for the organization of games, and although "there [was] plenty of room left on the property for ... a playground,"¹³ the problem was still unresolved two years later: "The second point is the grounds for recreation for the school children, and what we wanted to know was whether there was land available for that purpose. Our school inspector seems to think that there should be about three acres to be used for recreational facilities and school gardens."¹⁴ These early problems indicated what was to be the norm for some considerable time to come—physical education and sports remained an incidental adjunct to the dominant elements of the curriculum. Marjorie Hinds, who succeeded Hershel was able to organize regular adult education and recreation on several evenings per week,¹⁵ but that appears to have been the extent of work in the area of physical education and sport during the school's initial phase. Traditional games, in any case, were not a part of the work of schooling at that time.¹⁶ Sports Day remained the main occasion for sports and games, but by the 1950s, it was gradually complemented by other community festivals, usually organized by active members of the Community Club. This work was subsequently carried on by the experts at the Sport & Recreation Division which was established in the late 1950s. The Division is represented in the communities through the Recreation Coordinator.

This situation changed little during the first two decades subsequent to the opening of the day school in 1946. A physical education component was gradually introduced into the curriculum, but no clear sense of direction was discernible. Playgrounds were still an issue in 1952. The first *School Bulletin* argued for their acculturative utility: "It is there that the majority of discipline problems can be eliminated. There is no better way of teaching the valuable ideas of citizenship than to participate [in] and organize playground activities."¹⁷ The general problem of 'leisure' time was framed in a similar way:

(2) Community Recreation and Physical Education.

.... One of the greatest problems in northern communities is the proper use of leisure time. If wholesome and worthwhile activities can be found for both children and adults, many of the problems which generally arise in such communities will never occur. ...

Some activities which might be undertaken, are: ...

(b) Encouragement of sports such as badminton, softball, football, basketball, curling, tennis, horse shoe pitching, etc.

(c) Organizing and assisting in community athletic organizations; ...

(f) Organizing of physical education groups or 'keep fit' clubs.¹⁸

In 1948, the NWT entered into an agreement with the federal government under the National Physical Fitness Act which allowed the territorial council to draw on federal expertise and funds in the development of physical fitness programs. The rationale guiding this program was an early indicator of the remedial position which sport and physical education were to occupy some twenty years later. The report noted that "sports and athletic equipment of all kinds [were] lacking in the schools. This aspect of school life is particularly important for the Indian and Eskimo children, for sports encourage them to overcome any feelings of inferiority, and to develop initiative and leadership."¹⁹ This approach was mirrored in the report of a curriculum review committee which was published some years later. The functional utility of recreation, referred to under the heading of "objectives of self-realization," was diffusely circumscribed thus: "10. Recreation: The educated person is participant and spectator in many sports and other pastimes."²⁰

In these, and various other policy statements, the traditional games were by and large simply ignored; sports and recreation were to be used as acculturative practices easing the teenage generation's transition into what under the concrete conditions of the North was the more or less hypothetical life-style of a southern urbanization. By the early 1970s, the unsuitability of the formalized work of schooling to prepare the children for the practical concerns of life on the land, led to an increasing degree of dissatisfaction among Gwich'in parents and educators. "It is pretty disappointing to go out into the bush and not know the first thing about how to skin the animal after it is shot," as Charles Koe framed the problem.²¹ William Nerysoo expressed the same concern in no uncertain terms, addressing the threatened vitality of the traditional games in the process: "From now on, every year in school, they should teach the kids on the *akàii*. That's a great thing to do.

That's what I want to see! Them school kids—they learn education and nothing else. They never try to teach them in the Loucheux way! Lots of things to learn! Why don't they teach the kids about out-in-the-bush life? ... lots of people, they never learn games from long time ago."²²

Subject	Grade							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8/9
<i>Health</i>	body parts	food we eat	feelings	Indian medicine	Indian cures	feasts	Indian vitamins	Loucheux recipes
<i>Music</i>	simple dance	Loucheux hymn, song	traditional dances	Loucheux fiddle music	traditional instruments	traditional songs	community music	ceremonial song, dance
<i>Social Studies</i>	my family & relatives	community workers	community buildings	my home town	clothing & transport	place names	chiefs & elders	family trees
<i>Art</i>	building with natural material	modelling with natural material	stringing, braiding, weaving	woodwork (birch, green)	Indian dyes	traditional sewing & carving	making on-the-land items	drawings for local legends
<i>Science</i>	fish, birds	land, sky, water	seasons	insects	earth, water, fire, sun, wind	living in harmony with nature	uses & preparations on land, water	Indian life cycle
<i>Cultural 1</i>	cooperation	respect for others	patience	respect for religion	family roles	family tree	respect for nature	respect for elders
<i>Cultural 2</i>	bush camp	spring camp	fish camp	ceremonies	stories	legends	hunt, trapping	survival skills
<i>Physical Education</i>	Loucheux ball games	Loucheux stick games	Loucheux hand games	Loucheux hockey	Nakak cho (football)	Loucheux stick push	mooseskin handball	akaii (blanket toes)

GLCC

Illustration 10 Units 1-11 for Loucheux Language School Program, ca. 1975-80 (Excerpts)

Motivated by such concerns, Gwich'in educators who at that time acted as 'classroom assistants' drew up the first teaching plan to represent in a significant way elements of the traditional culture, in the classroom. This effort resulted in the plan partly reproduced in Illustration 10. It is noteworthy that the hand game was included as part of the physical education program, but the plan never moved beyond the planning stages. In the end, the available resources were predominantly devoted to teaching the standard physical education curriculum.

A major reevaluation in the area of curriculum development occurred at about the same time, in the early 1970s. The intention of this reversal of policy was to reposition the locus of authority such that the appropriate contents of the work of schooling was determined at the community level; the curriculum was to be made more meaningful and relevant for educational work at the community level. While such attempts had been made sporadically, they had usually occurred at the initiative of individual educators rather than as the result of a reorientation of departmental policy. The policy shift resulted in the first NWT curriculum document, *Elementary Education*.²³ The main objective of the new strategy was a reversal of the language policy. English was to be relegated to a secondary position, while the primary language of instruction and learning during the

early years was to be the Native language.²⁴ A reference to traditional games was inserted into the curriculum, but the games in question were Inuit games exclusively; no mention of Gwich'in or other Dene games was made. This policy was extended through the 1977 Education Ordinance which asserted the right of Native people to control the contents and methods of education. The influence of the Local Education Advisory Committees (now called, Community Education Councils) on program construction and delivery was strengthened, and a process of decentralization instituted through the creation of regional boards of education.²⁵ At present, the Fort McPherson Community Education Council is authorized to advise on, and review, the programming in the school and in adult education; the hiring of personnel; the language of instruction; and, to a certain extent, the school calendar. There remains, however, a vague kind of dissatisfaction in the community with regard to the individual's influence over the process of decision-making. Many old-timers, who, by virtue of their generational seniority, should be members of the council, are deterred from joining by the sense of unease which is created when they are supposed to function within the context of bureaucratic procedures.

A new high school physical education curriculum for grades 7 to 12 was published in 1990. The curriculum was specifically designed to promote sensitivity to and participation in activities which "reflect the cultural background of the students."²⁶ A Dene games committee was struck which was responsible for formulating the part of the curriculum dealing with traditional games. The document contains an extended section on drum dancing and on the hand game, and although it does not make specific reference to traditional games of the Gwich'in, it assigns the traditional games an important place in the educational process.

While this curriculum was still largely modelled on the Alberta curriculum, the most recent document represents a strategic departure from all preceding approaches, in a number of ways. *Dene Kede* is intended to produce a holistic representation of Dene culture.²⁷ It was written by Dene educators exclusively, and the contents was developed and formulated in close collaboration with a committee of elders representing the five groups of the Dene. *Dene Kede* is designed to provide students with a perspective on life on the land, by leading them through the seasonal cycle. The various animal species which are of importance in the 'dual economy' are examined through the progression of the annual cycle. The values related to and actualized through life on the land, and expressed through the concepts of the Dene languages, are articulated and examined. In an attempt to approximate the traditional indirect methods of observation and imitation, the teaching is strongly oriented towards project work and experiential rather than purely cognitive learning.

The resources required for this kind of undertaking are extensive. At this early point in time, the preparation of instructional material puts significant pressure on the educators, because *Dene Kede*, in representing the unity of culture of the five separate groups of the Dene, is necessarily somewhat generic in character. It is intended to provide the foundation for the community-based programs which transmit the contents with specific reference to the locally relevant cultural con-

figuration. The responsibility for creating the appropriate instructional material to a large extent rests with the Gwich'in educators in the community. This serves to increase their work load considerably.

Traditional games are specifically addressed; of the games listed, a considerable number were also played by the Gwich'in. The section dealing with 'play' refers to a further thirty-five games.²⁸ Since the document only provides the foundation for the programs developed in the communities, sufficient latitude is provided for the inclusion of more Gwich'in traditional games into the work of schooling. However, the educators find it difficult at present to locate 'resource people,' that is to say, elders who are interested in, and willing to, demonstrate the traditional games. When, back in McPherson, I mentioned an impromptu drum concert put up by Hyacinthe Andre at his home in Arctic Red River some days earlier, one educator spontaneously drew up a plan for getting the old man into the class room at Chief Julius school to demonstrate *udzi* to the sixth grade. As it turned out, this plan could not be realized.

This incident points to an underlying problem which culturally authentic educational work within the school system is faced with at present. Generally speaking, the competency of educators to teach in accordance with *Dene Kede* is based on forms of social as well as cultural capital which is determined by their membership in Gwich'in society and by their access to linguistic capital represented by mastery of the Gwich'in language. Within the context of the formalized system of education, however, the valorization of these forms of capital is dependent upon forms of capital germane to the educational system, that is to say, formal authorizations to teach, or educational degrees.²⁹ The latter authority is not immediately contingent on demonstrated mastery of the practical problems to be addressed and taught through *Dene Kede*. It will be remembered that the demonstration of such practical mastery over the trajectory of the individual's life, usually in conjunction with generational seniority, constituted the basis of traditional educational authority. Where the authority to teach is not contingent upon such demonstrated mastery, the authenticity of the cultural arbitrary is dependent upon the elders' involvement in the process. In their social position is embodied the authenticity of the cultural arbitrary at issue in *Dene Kede*.

Educators working within the school system at Fort McPherson are frequently confronted with the frustrating problem that elders as well as parents are reluctant to involve themselves appropriately in the work of schooling. Some parents and elders are unfamiliar with the formalized system of education as represented by the school environment. "We tell them, 'Come in one afternoon a month, and help the teacher out.' Many of them are so intimidated by the school environment that they won't even come."³⁰ Parents, for one, should be the 'resource people' to extend the classroom teaching into the home environment. This most urgently concerns the habitual and regular use of the Gwich'in language in the home. "We can't totally teach the children to speak Gwich'in if we only teach it in the school, and it's so alien from the [traditional] Gwich'in environment. ... It's so important in trying to teach the kids from that perspective—and then you have them going home

into this English-speaking environment, and not having it reinforced. It makes it really difficult and frustrating," as one educator explained the problem. A major obstacle the educators have to contend with in this respect is the pervasive influence of television in people's daily lives. There is an intermittent discussion concerning ways in which the medium could be used for local purposes, but nobody is sure at this point in time about how to approach it. "If we could get Gwich'in-speaking programs with Gwich'in-speaking people, I am sure that would open their eyes to the value of, you know, the Gwich'in identity and the language that goes with it." A project which was initiated recently with a grant awarded by the Charitable Foundation of the Body Shop Corporation, is intended to remedy this situation and to stimulate an intensified use of the Gwich'in language in the home.

Sometimes, however, obstacles to the success of such projects are located quite outside the domain of language instruction proper. For a considerable number of parents, an impediment to an intensified involvement in this process appears to be their fascination with Bingo. They will attend the game so frequently that their educational responsibilities are neglected. Bingo is said to derive part of its popularity from the fact that it provides an occasion for socializing and visiting, but I found the two or three Bingos which I attended to be rather quiet affairs where everybody's attention was mainly focussed on the game sets and on the steady stream of announcements. Socializing was limited to short periods of time before and after the event.³¹

A similar hesitancy can be noted with regard to the elders who, by virtue of their generational seniority even in respect of the parental generation, are the culturally appropriate educators in many areas of traditional culture. Over the years, many elders have found themselves marginalized and largely ignored by a young generation who do not speak the traditional language, making it impossible for them to carry out their obligated educational duties. They are now often reluctant to involve themselves in the educational process, in particular in the exposed position defined by their appearance in a classroom. Similarly problematic is the fact that some elders have come to expect payment for such services, thus in effect undermining the very notions of communality and cooperation to which, by virtue of their generational seniority, they ought to give practical expression. One educator who explained this to me stopped just barely short of indicating that this was considered to be an abdication of educational responsibility: "... today we need them to reteach our language, and the culture and the traditional way of life ... to make the people realize why they did it. We can't even go forth and ask for help without they asking for pay. ... Pay for every little thing that they do—that just turns me off." The authentication of educational work through the mobilization of cultural, social, and symbolic capital embodied in the position of the elder is thus sometimes beset with difficulties. There exists, of course, a further aspect of the authenticity of the traditional form, and this resides in the manner in which it relates the individual to the land.

1.2. Outdoor Education

The overriding concern of educators at this point in time is the perpetuation of the Gwich'in language. In that the language has historically oriented people towards the practical concerns of living on the land, instruction in the practical bush crafts necessarily forms an integral part of the educational process. "You've got to have all the tools, all the implements for teaching the language, around. That was the original way of learning—observing and watching, and not asking any questions." One educator has for some time been planning to set up an immersion camp at Point Separation (upstream of the confluence of Peel and Mackenzie Rivers). The emphasis will be on practical, experiential learning. "All the things that we could teach those people, you make it so interesting that they want to come back.... If I can get out to Point Separation next summer and set up my camp, I'll just pick up a few people from town and say, 'How would you like to go out there with me and learn some of the skills out there?' Take an elder with us or somebody that is fluent in the language, and just get into the language and just speak it."

Such a camp was organized during the winter of 1991-92, not at Point Separation, but at a location in the mountains, distant from town about an hour and a half by skidoo. This camp was attended by younger children. Upon arrival at the site, they were instructed in the traditional camp skills. The boys and girls each set up a wall tent for their own use. They were then instructed in the use of snowshoes, and in basic fire-making and survival skills. On the subsequent day, one of the local hunters took them into the bush to demonstrate the skills of the caribou hunt. The proper way of skinning and butchering the animal was explained. Sled wrappers were made from mooseskin, and the day concluded with the manufacture of a traditional bow and arrow set. In the evening, the usefulness of the Northern Lights in predicting the weather, was explained. The children were greatly interested in the traditional skills, "they really get into it. They try everything out," one of the educators remarked. A camp which was organized in the winter of 1992, by contrast, was not met with such undivided success. One of the resource people at the camp, one of the community's traditional hunters, found many of the students to be quickly bored by what he had to say. He particularly found them uninterested in the caribou hunt. They wanted to go back to town fairly soon after their arrival at the camp. To compound the problem, another successful hunter now sometimes finds himself with an unexpected surplus of caribou meat in the freezer. Some of the children in the family have developed a preference for store-bought food, over against the traditional country fare, and this is also true in some families composed of teenage parents and their children. This man thought it possible that the dis-habituation from the old-time diet might serve to weaken one of the fundamental links which ought to connect the teenage generation to the land, viz., the connection which is provided through the people's reliance on caribou as a source of food.

1.3. Old-time Games

The traditional games are in a precarious position in these processes. Some women educators organized an informal games workshop in 1992, during which some of the children's games referred to

in a previous chapter, were tried out. In general, the situation has not improved much on the one which led to William Nerysoo's outburst referred to above. Furthermore, some Gwich'in educators have come to view the educational utility of the traditional form in respect of the performance principle of modern sports. On one occasion, I had made an argument not dissimilar from the one developed in Chapter 4, pointing out the implicit elements of cooperation structuring the old games. The educator responded that her immediate concern was to simply keep the children in school, and if the traditional games were to have any utility in that regard, they would have to be approached in the "competitive spirit" characteristic of the dominant field of sports and physical education. One could not expect the traditional form to find interest with the children unless it could "hold its own" in a field defined by the competitive logic of modern sports. Only then would the games serve "to increase the pride in Gwich'in culture" derived from the understanding that many of the popular competitive sports actually have an antecedent counterpart in the traditional inventory, such as shinny and Gwich'in football. Ultimately, she speculated, this could lead to the inception of a 'trans-Canadian' Native Olympics. As the teenage generation's interest in sports is at this point not complemented by a similar sustained interest in the traditional games—being shaped by the regular passive consumption of WWF wrestling, NHL hockey, professional baseball, and so forth—such an approach will be faced with considerable difficulties.

The effects of the 'performance principle' are thus felt in even this sector of the educational field. Its implicit imposition, as was pointed out above, occurred in the mission school. In order to more clearly delineate its current importance for the traditional games in their relationship to the field of sports, it is necessary to trace its development in greater detail. The principle's signifying force was introduced in its full extent through TEST.

2. The Territorial Experimental Ski Training Program

TEST, the Territorial Experimental Ski Training Program, had its origin in a community ski club founded in Old Crow on 9 November 1955. At that time, the elders and educators had to tackle a problem which they had not been confronted with up to that time, viz., juvenile delinquency. The resident Oblate priest, Father Mouchet, suggested that it would be useful to introduce a program of regularized sports and exercises in order to alleviate the boredom which was seen to be one of the immediate causes of the problem. In specifically proposing that a downhill ski program be instituted, Mouchet sought to activate a form of physical capital which he had acquired as a competent downhill skier in his native France. Such a program also provided him with an opportunity to enhance his contacts into a community which in its great majority belonged to the Anglican church.³² It soon became apparent, however, that downhill skiing did not provide for a mode of orientation towards the land congruent with traditional Gwich'in expectations, and thus did not create much interest. The club was transformed into a cross-country ski club. The initial equipment was secured through an international campaign, and training began in the summer of 1956.

In attempting to provide the teenage generation with a mode of orientation towards the land which ostensibly was more congruent with the traditional form, the performance principle was initially only one of the motivating elements behind the program. By 1958, however, the skiers began to enter competitions in Alaska, with unexpected success. International competitions became an accepted aspect of the program, and in 1963, Martha Benjamin won the Canadian cross-country championship. The high point, and also the turning point, of the Old Crow program occurred between 1969 and 1971, when Mary and Shirley Frost won first or second places at the Arctic Winter Games, the Alberta championships, and at the Top of the World ski meet in Inuvik; participation at the World Junior Championships in Copenhagen and the World Championships in Czechoslovakia followed.³³

By 1964, at the time of Martha Benjamin's successes, the program had become sufficiently successful to attract the interest of the Recreation Department of NWTG. Mouchet was asked to extend the program into communities of the western Northwest Territories. The program was extended again in 1967. Under a grant awarded by the National Fitness Council, the *Territorial Experimental Ski Training Program* was launched.³⁴ This effectively marked the demise of the original program at Old Crow. The administrative centre was relocated to Inuvik. A board of trustees which initially did not have either Dene or Inuit members, was instituted to oversee the program's operation. In its explicit endorsement of competitive high performance sport, the orientation of the new program differed from the community-based program originally initiated by Mouchet and his coworkers. The program's objectives clearly stated the acculturative intent:

1. To investigate if Indian and Eskimo youth in the N.W.T. can be motivated to higher general achievement as students and citizens through participation in competitive athletics.
2. To develop a cross country skiing program for Northern youth that will provide meaningful athletic motivation and involve maximum personal effort.
3. To investigate the potential of Northern youth for making the best of their environment and excelling in competitive cross country ski racing at the national and international level.³⁵

The first coach hired for the program, Norwegian Bjorger Petterson, "developed a highly competitive program with the stress on excellence and high achievement."³⁶ Petterson's approach was attuned to the program's official objectives. At the administrative level, the reorientation was reflected in the program's organizational relocation from Old Crow to Inuvik. Inuvik was then—and it still is—the major administrative centre for the western Arctic, and it contained the large-scale infrastructural installations of the region necessary for the realization of a high performance program. It is probably fair to say that the program selected the most promising base of operation to realize the defined goals; whether the participants, in the absence of alternative choices other than non-participation or dropping out, selected the most promising program for the realization of their own aspirations, I was unable to determine with any certainty. From TEST's perspective, the

necessity to relocate was self-evident in that Inuvik would provide the infrastructure through which to effect the intended habituation to achievement orientation inculcated through regularized high performance sport; it was assumed that this would somehow generalize to achievement orientation as a general disposition, most notably in the educational field and in terms of employment aspirations.³⁷ The operative logic behind this thinking was not all that dissimilar from the thinking of the Anglican missionaries when they instituted a system of calisthenics and physical training at the Hay River mission school. The fact that many TEST graduates were and are in important political and cultural leadership positions in the Native communities, is often marshalled as proof of the program's efficacy, and the detailed interview data presented by Glassford et al. corroborate this evaluation,³⁸ but in delimiting its intake area to include the population of one of only two residential senior high schools in the area at that time (the other one being in Yellowknife), TEST pre-selected the possibility of entry into the program in favor of the group of Native teenagers already most closely attuned to the desired achievement orientation, and thereby in favor of its own goals.

In focussing during its early years almost exclusively on leadership, TEST found it difficult to create a sustained following, at the community level. The exclusive focus on high performance sports proved to be an uncertain foundation for sustained involvement in the program, in the remote communities. Only five years after the move from Old Crow to Inuvik, Mouchet and his coworkers found it necessary to attempt to "re-activate" the program in even the community which had succeeded in sustaining it for more than ten years prior to the move.³⁹ After sustained criticism from the outlying communities concerning the centralization at Inuvik, the program was spread out into the communities, and the focus shifted from an exclusive concern with high performance sport to the promotion of cross-country skiing as a leisure activity.

In this new focus, the program was particularly successful at Tulit'a (Fort Norman). After only two years of operation, the program succeeded in involving all but four children in the community in skiing. A two day overnight marathon was organized which involved almost the whole community as participants or volunteers, and at the Top of the World ski meet in Inuvik in 1975, Fort Norman fielded the most successful team.⁴⁰ A similar approach was followed by the Fort McPherson ski club. Here, as well, the focus was on effecting broad participation rather than high performance: "... all kids like to race, but what we hopefully can get is a proper technique. Whether they win a race or not, that's not important. It's good to get them in a competition, but that doesn't necessarily mean that we have to produce winners. We try and get as many kids involved as possible."⁴¹ Earl Olson, coach and manager of the club, went on to note, however, the lack of sustained community involvement and support for the program in the community. Thus, for lack of women volunteers, he was able to bring only two girls to the Top of the World meet, whereas in the preceding year, the club had managed to send a full team.

The ambivalence between meeting the intentions of the performance principle and the community-oriented nature of the wider program which characterized TEST until its demise in the late

1970s, can also be found in the treatment which some of the outstanding athletes received from their home communities. A skier from the Sahtu, considered by many experts to have been the technically best athlete to have emerged from the program, turned to alcohol, because he could not synchronize the conflicting demands of the performance principle, and of the tendency of bush consciousness not 'to stand out' through explicit comparison with others. He passed away at an early age. Similar conflicts also induced an exceptional woman skier to drop out of the program at Old Crow, at the height of her career.⁴²

These ambivalences had its origin in different concepts about the possibilities for interconversion of the different forms of capital which were at stake. The notion that the physical capital of sports, extant in the mode of valorization provided through interpersonal competition, could be converted into a specific form of educational capital was an adjunct of a characteristically North American, or more specifically, southern Canadian, educational ideology.⁴³ The cultural arbitrary which was made manifest by such thinking, ran counter to traditional forms of valorization of achievement which were still beholden to 'bush consciousness,' albeit in a rudimentary form. Some of those with the greatest success—as determined according to TEST's frame of reckoning—had to face the most serious disavowal in their home communities.⁴⁴

3. A Workshop

In 1969, a conference was held in Inuvik relative to the proposed establishment of a 'University of the North.' In the course of a discussion concerning the position of traditional culture in the curriculum of such an institution, a plan was drawn up to focus greater attention on the traditional games. Gerry Glassford and Harvey Scott, both with the University of Alberta, were asked to participate in a planned project. At the suggestion of Nellie Cournoyea, Gerry Glassford, in cooperation with Ruth Carol and Mary Teya, applied for a grant to organize a Gwich'in traditional games workshop, under the Secretary of State's *New Horizons* program. The proposal was accepted, and although the funds had been available for some time, it took until 1975/6 before planning and preparation began in earnest. The final impetus was provided by the *Northern Games* which in the summer 1975 were held in Fort McPherson. This festival, which by and large focuses on Inuit games, demonstrated to the Gwich'in that the traditional games could be adapted to the format of modern sports competition. It was in this context that Charles Koe made the remark which prefaces this chapter. I shall have something more to say concerning the connection between Northern Games and Gwich'in traditional games in a subsequent section.

The workshop was held in Fort McPherson, in February 1976. In distinct contrast to the work of schooling at that point, or to the focus of TEST, for that matter, a strong emphasis was placed on the participation of old-timers. Many of the old-timers in attendance had still played the games while travelling on the land. For them, the event amounted to a journey back in time,⁴⁵ and the proceedings took on the character of a cultural celebration rather than a technical workshop. Commu-



Lorne Smith

Jli Juudin neenjit yuudlai'?—'Caribou Eyes'
Mrs. Lucy Vanellsi and Mrs. Annie B. Robert



Lorne Smith

Gwich'in Baseball
pitching: Mrs. Annie B. Robert

Illustration 11 Gwich'in Taitlr'idl'in—Traditional Games Workshop, Fort McPherson 1976

nity involvement was strong throughout the week, and demonstrations of games such as the bouncing game and the stick pull proved to be especially popular.⁴⁶ The interest exhibited by some of the children, by contrast, was somewhat muted. Some of the old-timers were brought into the school room during the event, but they found some of the children not to be very interested in games most of which they had never heard of. An NHL game, shown on video—that is to say, only ‘time-delayed’—at approximately the same time, generated more interest among the children than the old-timers’ visit.⁴⁷

During the workshop it was decided to found a ‘Loucheux Cultural Association’ to continue the work of revitalization,⁴⁸ but in hindsight it can be noted that the awareness of the traditional form generated at the workshop did not translate into a sustained practice at the community level. The difficulty of creating sustained community involvement in such endeavors, which had already beset the operation of the ski club, was evident in the case of even this genuine historical tradition. A critique of the workshop formulated by a Gwich’in cultural activist attributed this lack of involvement to the reliance by Gwich’in not only on assistance by technical experts, but on the reliance on government intervention and funding in general. The success of such projects, according to the critique, hinged on active involvement by the whole community. This could only be achieved if the responsibility for such projects in their totality, remained at the local level. Consequently, the work hitherto carried out by technical experts had to be replaced by a process of decision-making involving the whole community, “by a committee formed through the authorization of the native people of the community.”⁴⁹ At the same time, work on behalf of such projects had to be undertaken in a spirit of mutuality, that is to say, without requesting specific payment for services rendered. This was seen to be undermining the traditional emphasis on cooperation and mutual support. The argument was extended to include rejection of government funding for such projects in general, so as to be able “to have complete control of the programs, which is not possible if the program is funded by the government or outside organizations.”⁵⁰

Inasmuch as the workshop did little to rekindle a sustained interest in the traditional games, this political intervention remained unsuccessful. A number of what, for the lack of a better term, I refer to as traditional ‘games-festivals,’ have been more successful in this respect.

4. Games-Festivals: *Northern Games, Dene Games*

At present, three different kinds of games-festivals exist whose objective is either exclusively or in part the reproduction of the traditional games, viz., the *Arctic Winter Games*, the *Northern Games*, and two variants of *Dene Games*. In all three instances, the games are played in the format of a contemporary, competitive athletic meet. To varying degrees, the festivals are modelled on the organizational structure of the modern Olympic Games. In all cases, there is also an intended parallelism to the structures of signification of the Olympics, that is to say, there is an intended, but only sometimes realized, emphasis on competition and interpersonal comparison. At the same

time, however, rudiments of the old approach towards achievement, of bush consciousness, are still in evidence, to varying degrees. By virtue of these distinctions, the distributional properties of the field which is produced at the point of articulation of modern sports with the traditional games, and thus the position, the problems and the prospects facing the latter, can be fairly well determined.

The Arctic Winter Games have over the year gained the greatest prominence, but I will mainly focus my argument on the Northern Games and the Dene Games. For the Gwich'in, the Arctic Winter Games have been a distant, peripheral event,⁵¹ but they have participated regularly in the Northern Games, and have recently expressed an interest in joining the *Sahtu Dene Games*. I will further focus my argument in the main on the present state of these festivals, and their function in the mediation of bush consciousness and the performance principle; their administrative and organizational history has been examined in detail by Paraschak.⁵²

4.1. Northern Games

The *Northern Games* developed out of an initiative devised by Gerry Glassford and Nellie Cournoyea in 1969. Glassford had completed the field research for his study of culture change and Inuit games,⁵³ and in order to reciprocate for the help he had received from Inuit old-timers, he organized a demonstration of the various games which had been explained to him in the course of his research. It was on this occasion that Cournoyea and he discussed the possibility of applying for a grant to extend the demonstration into a regular games meet. This plan was realized under the leadership of Edward Lennie. The proposal was driven by a concern that the Arctic Winter Games, which were being organized at the same time, were made up of non-traditional competitions exclusively. The proposal envisaged a weekend of traditional Inuit games as part of the NWT centennial celebrations. This weekend was held in March of 1970, and in July of that same year, the first Northern Games were held in Inuvik.

4.1.1. Inuit and Dene Traditional Games

From the Games' inception, Gwich'in have been regular participants in some of the competitions as well as in the cultural performances, but the event's focus has consistently been on Inuit games. Gwich'in and Dene traditional games have remained in a peripheral position, although the program for the first Games in 1970 contained a long section describing Gwich'in games. The 1970 Games contained a demonstration of *udzi* which was won by a team from Fort Good Hope led by Gregory Shae. In subsequent years, the stick pull, the pole push, the bow and arrow shoot, and the bouncing game were introduced, and discarded. The high point of Gwich'in participation occurred during the festivals staged in and after 1975, which was the year of the traditional games workshop. The Northern Games 1975 had been held in Fort McPherson, and the event had demonstrated to the people the vitality of the Inuit traditional games. Driven by the interest in the traditional form generated by the Northern Games, the workshop was finally held in early 1976, and at the 'Good People Contest' at the 1976 Coppermine Games, Hyacinthe Andre won first prize for manufacturing a traditional Gwich'in mooseskin ball. This was the only time that this particular competition was

organized. For the 1979 games, James Ross produced a booklet describing several Gwich'in traditional games,⁵⁴ and the Games at Holman (1980) and Fort McPherson (1981) were called 'Inuit/Dene Games' rather than 'Northern Games.' The traditional games described by Ross were shown at the Holman Games by the 'Fort McPherson Dene Games Demonstration Group.' James Ross' games descriptions were subsequently included again in the program for the 1983 Games at Akla-vik, which by this time had reverted to the old designation, 'Northern Games.' This marked the end of the relatively high profile for Dene and Gwich'in traditional games. In that same year, the Sahtu/Great Bear region, dissatisfied with the dominant focus on Inuit games over the years, split from the Northern Games Association and organized as its Great Bear Region. The Gwich'in and three Inuit communities remained in the Western Arctic Region of the Association. The Great Bear Region organization did not play a significant role in the Northern Games Association, but it provided an organizational foundation for the *Dene Games*, then in an early stage of their organizational development.

Gwich'in and Dene traditional games have not been able to transcend their peripheral position as 'demonstration sports' at the Northern Games. At the 1991 Games, *udzi* was demonstrated by a group of stick gamblers who had travelled to Inuvik from Ross River, Yukon. The time for the demonstration, however, coincided with the Inuit blanket toss. The Ross River team thus found themselves in the unenviable position of having to play the hand game at the back of the stage, ignored by the large crowd that had assembled at the front of the stage to watch the blanket toss. A second demonstration, which was hastily scheduled for the subsequent day, was cancelled.

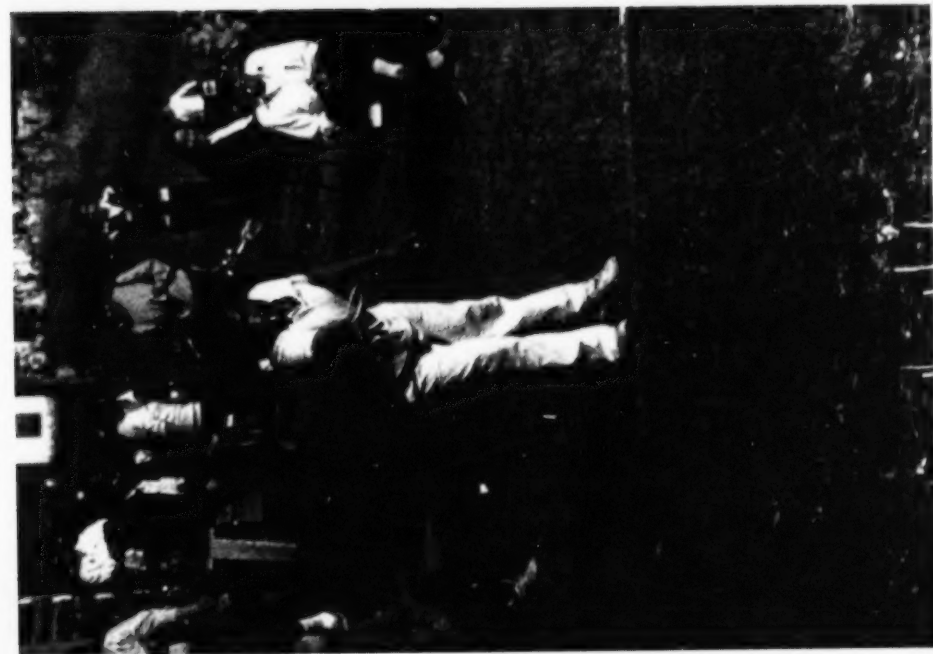
4.1.2. The Good Woman Contest

Gwich'in participation has been closely associated with an event which was devised specifically for the Northern Games, the 'Good Woman Contest.' It was positioned as a replacement for the election of an 'Indian Princess' or 'Indian Beauty Queen,' which at that point had been a customary feature of the various Spring Jamborees and Carnivals in the North. The Games organizers argued that the aesthetics expressed through such elections did not bear any relationship to the defining elements of traditional gender relationships which were rather to be sought in the division of labor traditionally structuring the domestic mode of production, and this was to be reflected in the practical tasks of the Good Woman Contest.⁵⁵ The event thus provides a synthesis of traditional subsistence skills, and the formal organization of the Games—defined, as it is, by the interpersonal competitiveness of the field of sport. It consists of disciplines such as seal skinning, muskrat skinning, tea-boiling, wood chopping, log splitting, and bannock-baking, in a competitive format. In 1976, male participants entered the event in a separate category, and it was designated as the 'Good People Contest.' Men have intermittently participated since that time, but the event reverted to its old name soon after the 1976 Games. Gwich'in women have been regular participants in this event. Mrs. Mary Firth won the very first contest, held in 1970, and Mrs. Jane Charlie emerged as the winner in 1971; both are from Fort McPherson.

4.1.3. Standards for Measurement

By 1977, the institutionalized elements of the performance principle had been introduced; abstract measurements of time and distances have been carried out since then, and meticulous track has been kept of 'records.' Attempts to better the Games record in the men's One Foot High Kick—which is the premier event of the Northern Games—now create intense interest. In the case of the Good Woman Contest, where not only the speed, but also the quality of the work is contested, this has led to the paradoxical situation where one old-timer's work is often judged by one of his peers (not necessarily a member of the same community), through the application of a point scale. This competitive format is an explicit attempt to align the event with the competitive logic which dominates the field of sports even in the remote North. In this manner, the organizers attempt to enhance the event's attraction for the young people. At the 1991 Northern Games in Inuvik, the efficacy of the performance principle, and the intended competitive orientation, were evident in a variety of aspects. Throughout the competitions, the announcer made reference to times and distances achieved at prior Games, constantly raising the possibility that the contestants might be able to improve on one of the records. Records indicate the high level of physical achievement which has come to be a characteristic of the Games. Athletes in many Inuit communities now train regularly in order to qualify for participation in the Arctic Winter Games or the Northern Games. This has created a separation of active participation from passive observation—a bifurcation which is typically associated with high performance sports, in particular in their televised mode. Spectators were separated from the participants, and the stage on which the various events occurred, by a fence (see Illustration 12, right photo). Between the fence and the actual stage, a passage had been left for the use of TV crews and photographers. Dutch and English crews which had flown in to record the proceedings, often obstructed the view with their equipment. To refer to a concern expressed as early as 1975 by a steady supporter of the program, the Games have in part become a "spectacle."⁵⁶

The emphasis on records and comparative achievement was expressed at the symbolic level through assigning prizes for superior performances. These, reflecting the Olympic Games on which the Northern Games are modelled, took the form of medals, given out to the first, second, third placed athletes. At the medal ceremonies, athletes who had placed lower than third did not receive any mention. The best athletes, in turn, were cast into a 'leadership' role such that the Games' organizers attempt to generalize the physical accomplishments demonstrated at the Games into an indicator of potential for achievement in other areas, most notable in the work of schooling.⁵⁷ In the early 1990s, this connection was prominently made through the person of Joe Dragon of Fort Smith, who at the time of the 1991 Northern Games and Dene Games had not only been drafted by the Pittsburgh Penguins of the National Hockey League, but who also was a successful student at Cornell University (see Illustration 13, right photo). It is through this connection between athletic and educational achievement that the organizers attempt to effect a pragmatic val-



Michael Heine

Sahtu Dene Games, Fort Norman: Open Competition



Michael Heine

Northern Games, Inuvik: Passive Participation

Illustration 12 Games in a Delimited Space



Michael Heino

Illustration 13 Leaders

JOE (PINTO) DRAGON

A Northerner Scores Big with Education

but because we have not found a large black colony of any size, it is likely to be a common, widespread but scarce occurrence in this New York State. It is in accord with the trend of our earlier studies.

the state of workers' relations, and the fact that the latter have been successful in attaining their aims. Nothing is to be feared from the fact that the latter have been successful in attaining their aims. Nothing is to be feared from the fact that the latter have been successful in attaining their aims.

[illegible]

The other effect is to double the amount of the deposit required to receive a particular amount of interest. For example, if the interest rate is 10 percent, the deposit must be \$100,000 to receive \$10,000 of interest. If the interest rate is 5 percent, the deposit must be \$200,000 to receive \$10,000 of interest.

For the purpose of this book, we are using a simple, but not too simple, linear model. Only those of us who have taken a course in statistics will understand the model, but we will explain it as we go along.



NTWVG, Dept. of Education

Joe Dragon of Fort Smith, drafted by the Pittsburgh Penguins, NHL

orization of the Games in respect of the teen-age generation currently attending school. Joe Dragon's sister, who is a high-ranking official with the Sport & Recreation Division of NWTG, travelled to Inuvik and gave a speech to the participating teenagers, focussing on the importance of sporting achievement in its connection with success in school. The desirability of such a scenario was discursively enhanced by contrasting it with the pervasive problem of alcohol abuse and family violence, known no doubt from first-hand experience to many of the teenagers present. She was accompanied by a young Inuit man who had been a member of an expedition which successfully attempted to reach the North Pole. He likewise made the connection between the detrimental effects of alcoholism and family violence, and the positive effects of achievement in sports which—given the right way of living—could be extended into educational achievement, or feats such as joining a polar expedition. The event, however, was not a complete success. The assembled teenagers were concentrating on their dinner as much as on the two speakers, and the deficient quality of the sound system made it sometimes difficult to follow what was said.

It is this assumption about the extensibility of the performance principle from the field of sports and games into other domains of contemporary life in the north, that, in the view of the event's organizers, gives coherence to the diverse structures of signification produced during the Northern Games. Attempts to mobilize the signifying force of the performance principle for similar purposes were in evidence at two Dene Games festivals which were held, also in the summer of 1991, in Fort Norman and in Rae/Edzo, but here, the intended competitive format was circumvented in a variety of ways. Inasmuch as the event's focus was intended to provide a similar demonstration of the performance principle's beneficial effects, and therefore necessarily rested on an appreciation of demonstrated superior physical prowess, failure was the inevitable result of this strategy. This did not deter the organizers from keeping track of times, distances, and scores, but in the absence of competitive comparisons, no sporting leaders could be marshalled to argue the case. There is no figure comparable to Joe Dragon, in the field of Dene traditional games. The authority of the elders who emerged as cultural leaders in the course of events, was based on a form of capital very different from the physical capital of a successful hockey player (see Illustration 13, left photo). By implication, such de-emphasis of interpersonal comparison and competition indicates a residual retention of bush consciousness.

4.2. *Dene Games*

The organizational development of the *Dene Games* in some respects parallels that of the Northern Games.⁵⁸ The first Games were held in Fort Rae in 1975.⁵⁹ They have by now become an annual event, referred to as the 'Fort Smith/Mackenzie Regional Dene Games,' although initially teams from more northerly communities such as Forts Franklin and Norman also participated. The communities of the Sahtu region organized their own festival, some years later. The *Sahtu Dene Games* were held for the first time in Fort Norman, in 1984.⁶⁰

4.2.1. Traditionality

From its inception, this festival was organized and planned by Dene cultural leaders and by volunteers in the communities, but traditional games were not initially part of the proceedings. The festivals of the mid-1970s and the early 1980s usually centered around a softball tournament. A general lack of knowledge about the traditional games inhibited the development of a program more attuned to the cultural traditions. It was out of an awareness of this deficiency that the cultural leaders who had been the driving force behind this festival, institutionalized their efforts by incorporating as the Dene Games Association.⁶¹ One of the Association's main goals was the institution of research and documentation projects into traditional games, and through the incorporation it was attempted to create an institutional entity to attract funding and technical expertise for such purposes. The first such project was devised by George Grandjambe in an extended proposal outlining the necessity of documenting the traditional games at Fort Good Hope for use by the young generation.⁶² No action was taken, but a similar proposal made by Gordon Yakeleyea, then chief at Fort Norman, resulted in a traditional games workshop in that community in October 1985.⁶³ The projected publication of a Sahtu Dene games booklet did not occur, but gradually, traditional games were added to the program of the Dene Games festivals, and they now make up the event exclusively.

4.2.2. Accountability

In staging the games-festivals the communities are confronted with the fact that, as far as organizational matters are concerned, they have to rely not only on government funding, but also on specialized personnel, that is to say, the local Recreation Coordinator. In turn, the Government of the Northwest Territories, that is to say, the experts at the Sport & Recreation Division, expect, as required by their mandate, tangible 'results' in return for investments made and assistance rendered. Roland Gosselin, in charge of Dene Games Programming, listed accountability for funds as the overriding administrative concern, and it is through this concern that elements of valorization typically positioned in the field of sports, come into play. Statistics, tables, records and medals are the physical substratum of symbolic capital as an adjunct of sporting capital transposed from the system of organized sports to the space of traditional games, where, from the administrative perspective of the Sport & Recreation Division, they constitute the measure of organizational efficiency, and thus of accountability. That is to say, the formal structure of the Dene Games—competitions based on generalized rules, and clearly defined schedules—is intended to ensure comparability of individual performances which, in the form of statistical tabulations, provides an objective measurement of organizational success and failure. This is most clearly expressed by the introduction of a point system which allows the communities to vie for a trophy given to the most successful team, that is to say, the community with the highest number of points. The statistical tabulations for the 1991 Rae/Edzo Dene Games take up no less than nineteen single-spaced pages of the Final Report.⁶⁴

This, as was discussed in Chapter 4, stands in marked contrast to aspects of bush consciousness traditionally actualized through old-time games where the emphasis used to be on process rather than on result, on cooperation as much as on individual achievement. Then, organization was of course minimal, and the importance attached to a given achievement rarely outlasted the occasion. One would assume, then, that traditional significations cannot be actualized quite as unequivocally in the intended competitive format of the contemporary Dene Games, but it was observable that through an implicit circumvention of the intended, explicitly competitive, format, the proceedings were frequently refocused towards traditional forms of expression.

4.2.3. Organization

At both the 1991 Fort Norman and Fort Rae Games, a fixed schedule existed mainly on paper, and was rarely adhered to in reality—much to the exasperation of the local Sport & Recreation Coordinator, but to nobody else's. In any case, the competitions were never scheduled to start before one o'clock, and often did not get under way before three o'clock. This gave everybody an opportunity to sleep off the fatigue of the preceding night's jigging, or square or drum dancing, which sometimes lasted until four or five o'clock in the morning. In fact, at the Sahtu Dene Games in Fort Norman, and, to a lesser extent at the Rae/Edzo Games, these dances, and not the competitions, constituted the event's main focus towards which the proceedings of the day were oriented and which provided the day's logical and meaningful conclusion. The scheduling in general was characterized by a great degree of flexibility—it appeared not to be a matter of being on time to conform to the schedule, but of assembling in what by tacit consent were considered sufficient numbers to get an event off the ground. Sometimes, this failed, and people would disperse again, only to reassemble at a later time and try again. At the Fort Norman Games, people constantly commuted between the community hall, where they checked the progress of the athletic events, and the visitors' tent site, located a short walk 'across town,' behind the Northern Store.

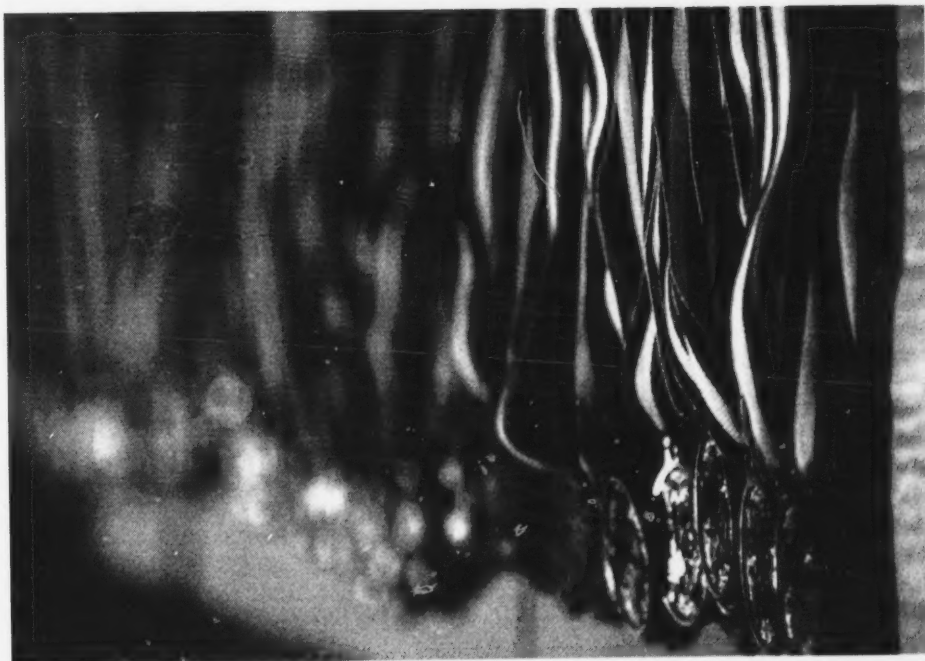
A similar degree of variability characterized the composition of teams. In order to ensure adequate accountability for the expenditure of travel funds, the Sport & Recreation Division required prior registration of participants by the communities involved. Theoretically, all participants representing the various communities were to have been selected prior to arrival. In reality, however, it happened on a number of occasions that vacant positions had to be filled on the spot. The list of participants in a given event often bore only faint resemblance to the original registration sheet.

4.2.4. Competition

As trivial as this problem probably was for all but the organizers, it implicitly points to another aspect of the expressive function of the games which implicitly locates them in the traditional domain rather than in the sphere of contemporary sports. The flexibility of team composition was closely linked to the degree of competitiveness exhibited in many of the events. By the standards of modern sports, the level of athletic achievement exhibited during the two Dene Games was not very high. (I will consider important exceptions to this statement below.) This was true of events

such as the bow & arrow shoot, the spear throw, or the axe throw. For example, the contestants in the bow & arrow shoot at the Sahtu Dene games consisted, as it were, of two groups—the first one made up of the single competitor who obviously had handled a bow before, the second consisting of everybody else. Needless to say, the experienced competitor won the event by a wide margin. In consequence, the flexibility of team composition followed from the low level of differentiation relative to technical or athletic skill. There rarely were irreplaceable players on any given team. Excellence being relatively unimportant, winning as the expression of superior skills could not be a significant criterion of distinction. During the Games, all athletes were applauded, the good as strongly as the mediocre or the downright incompetent. And the level of athletic competence, in turn, could be ascribed to the fact that little importance was attached to competition and winning, it could certainly not be ascribed to the participants' inability of mastering the requisite motor skills. It is just that the skills required in these competitions were no longer linked to the requirements of subsistence production, and most people did not find it necessary to practice them any longer—neither did people find it necessary to train in these disciplines in order to improve their skills for participation in the Dene Games. While I was staying at Wrigley to carry out research for a Dene games resource book, the Recreation Coordinator, himself a Slavey Dene, attempted on three different occasions and in preparation for the impending Sahtu Dene Games, to get the young people out for practice sessions in some of the traditional disciplines, but he had to cancel them all for lack of participation. In de-emphasizing in this manner the importance of winning by disregarding the importance of superior performance, an implicit approximation to the values of bush consciousness occurred.

A similar argument concerns the various kinds of awards to be won. At the Rae-Edzo Games, gold, silver and bronze medals were given out—the 'Olympic' derivation will be readily apparent (see Illustration 14, left photo). The competitors were clearly satisfied to have won the medals, but the greatest applause during the medal presentations was reserved for the winners of the two 'MVP' awards. These were not given for athletic achievement, but for the most significant cultural contributions. The winner of the men's award had not performed remarkably in any of the competitions. He received the award for having left his camp in the bush during the season in order to attend the Games. The significance of such an achievement in that particular context may not be immediately apparent, but the elders who made the decision wanted to situate the Games firmly in the traditional domain by linking them to one of the core elements of traditional life, viz., living on the land. Similarly, the trophy for the best team overall, a hand-painted paddle, was coveted because it has been produced by the popular Dene artist Archie Beaulieu, and as such was an object of great pride in its own right, and not merely because of any ostensibly inherent connection between the artifact and the notion of competitiveness in games. A comparable strategy was pursued at the Sahtu Dene Games, where not medals, but items of traditional manufacture, such as mittens and embroideries were given out (Illustration 14, right photo).



Michael Heine

Medal Presentation at the Rae/Edzo Regional Dene Games 1991



Michael Heine

Prize Presentation at the Sahtu Dene Games 1991

Illustration 14 Insignia of Achievement

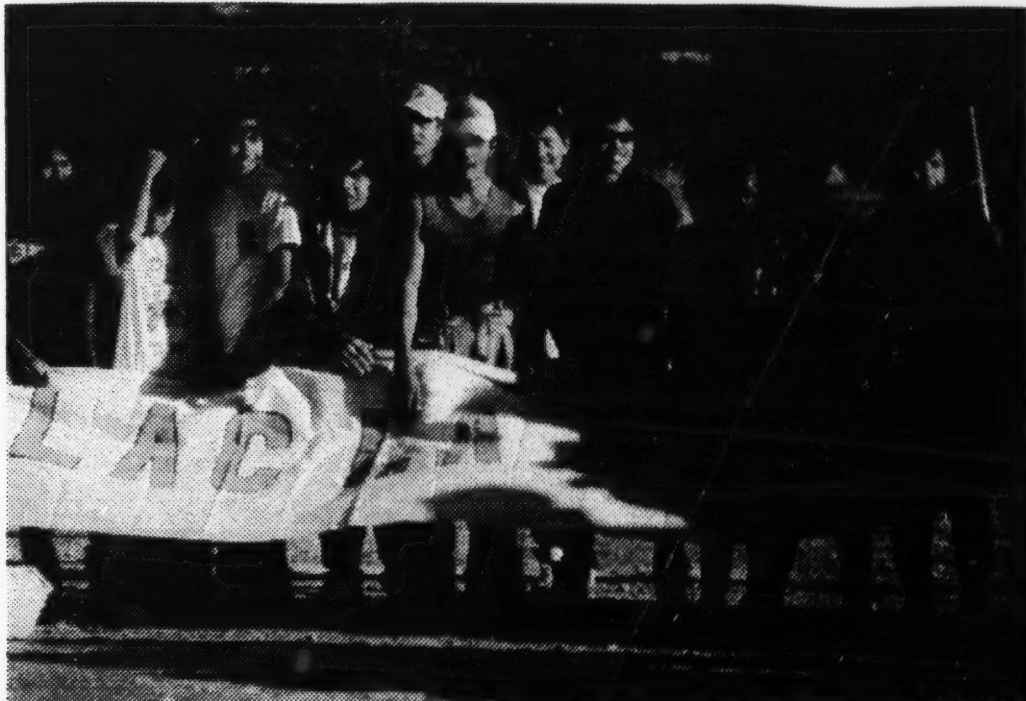
4.2.5. *The Good Woman Contest*

By contrast, some of the events featuring traditional survival skills exhibited distinctly higher degrees of competitive involvement. These disciplines were part of the Good Woman Contest. The model for the Dene variant of this contest are the Northern Games, where, as was pointed out above, the good woman contest provided a synthesis of traditional cultural skills and the competitive structures of the field of sport. Most people possess some, if not considerable, skill in completing the chores which make up this competition (muskrat skinning, tea-boiling, wood chopping, log splitting, bannock-baking, and tent setting), because they are routine elements of daily life. Excellence displayed in the mastery of ordinary skills may be little more than expected proof of common competency. This left little room for failure and increased the competitive pressures considerably. The events were watched by a great number of spectators who followed the proceedings with great interest, encouraging and supporting the participants with shouting and applause. Some of those present, young people in particular, would comment openly and critically on what were thought to be inadequate performances. The paradoxical situation thus developed that the festival's truly traditional activities most closely approximated the achievement orientation of modern sports, thus encouraging a disposition diametrically opposed to the tendency of bush consciousness to avoid overt interpersonal comparison.

Still, there were those who considered competitive comparisons in this particular domain to be altogether inappropriate. It was one thing to put traditional games into a contemporary competitive format. It was quite another to attempt and do the same with aspects of the culture which were not part of the traditional inventory of games, in the first place. The participants from Fort Franklin at the Sahtu Dene Games considered a good woman contest to be a rather inappropriate form of cultural expression, and they decided to stage their own games 'proper'—without the good woman contest. And so they did, after their return from Fort Norman.⁶⁵

4.2.6. *Udzi*

In distinction from many of the athletic events, the hand game was clearly positioned at the competitive end of the spectrum during both Games festivals. The hand game was, and still is today, one of the few public occasions where the men engage in unrestrained 'showmanship'. This is indeed the one traditional game which they will engage in with an explicit determination to win. At the Sahtu Dene Games in Fort Norman, the men played daily, sometimes well into the night. In Rae, the game was played on the evening of the final day, as part of the concluding ceremonies. Traditionally, as was discussed in a preceding chapter, the game occurred on important occasions such as the meetings between different groups in the bush, at the fur trading posts, or, later, the 'pay treaty' meetings; correlatively, the teams during the Games represented their respective home communities.



Michael Heine

Illustration 15 Community Affiliation
Rae / Edzo Regional Dene Summer Games 1991

4.3. Dene Games and the Infrastructure of Sport

This latter point provides a perspective on an aspect of local identity which is of relatively recent origin. For today's young generation, growing up in the settlements rather than the bush, community affiliation complements group identity as a meaningful element of orientation. Upon alighting from the bush planes, some of the teams at the Rae/Edzo Games unfolded sizeable banners declaring their village affiliation (see Illustration 15). It was expressed most emphatically during the hand games and the canoe races, if one is to judge by the level of shouting, noise and general excitement generated by these competitions. Development of settlement infrastructure and community identity are thus interconnected, and the games provide an opportunity where the latter can be actualized. However, infrastructural developments have concentrated on the field of modern sports. Most of the settlements in the western NWT contain recreation facilities of astonishing dimensions, taking into account the average size of the communities. Their mere existence places a constraint on the rediscovery of traditional games. On the practical level, these facilities would be quite suited to house traditional games, but the people are hesitant to use them for that purpose, because what use one will make of them cannot be separated from the pragmatic intent they represent. They provide an index on the distributional properties of the contemporary system of sport



Figure 10 Competition and Culture

Position of traditional activities at the *Sahtu Dene Games* and the *Rae/Edzo Regional Dene Summer Games*, in respect of the performance principle

and regularized competition—Basketball and Volleyball courts do not constitute an immediately accessible cultural environment for traditional games. It is true that traditional events are occasionally staged in the facilities, but their indexical qualities prevent the habitual association of facility and traditional activity, and, as far as the young people are concerned, this serves to foster, at the expense of traditional games, a predisposition towards modern sports as permanent as the facilities. In more than one way, then, the traditional forms in evidence at the Sahtu Dene Games and the Rae/Edzo Regional Dene Games were aligned to the system of contemporary sports, invariably in their intended organizational format, but in some instances also by virtue of forms of achievement orientation which were grounded in the practical logic of contemporary sporting practices and bolstered by infrastructural developments at the community level.

5. Summary

By way of a summary, these observations can be represented diagrammatically. If the vertical axis of a two-dimensional field represents the degree of competitiveness, the horizontal axis the degree of 'traditionality' of a given activity, the various disciplines can be mapped as shown in Figure 10—note that this represents the logic of my argument, not statistical data. The truly traditional activities were the hand game, located at the competitive end of the spectrum, and athletic competitions such as the spear throw and the bow-and-arrow shoot, clustered towards the non-

competitive end. This latter group of activities most closely reflected traditional dispositions which de-emphasized competition and comparative individual achievement. Most instructive with regard to the problem at hand is the good woman contest, which cannot really be placed in a single position within this schema. The activities themselves are traditional, but their focus on relative achievement within the context of the Games, places them in the organizational domain of sports. In this sense, the good woman contest constitutes a genuinely new form, created by the syncretism of northern tradition and southern sport.

As far as the Gwich'in are concerned at this point in time, however, the traditional games by and large fell by the wayside during the 1940s. In their connection to travelling on the land, they were affected by the community orientation which gradually began to develop during that time. This was, to a large extent, due to the institution of a system of education which began to attract the children into town, and during certain periods, their parents as well. It was not until the 1970s that traditional games came to be taken into consideration in the construction of the curriculum. At present, the *Dene Kede* curriculum document holds considerable promise for a reintroduction of traditional games into the system of formal education, but it is too early for an evaluation of *Dene Kede's* impact.

At present, the major occasion for the staging of traditional games is provided by a number of games-festivals which feature, to varying degrees, Dene and Inuit games. These festivals provide a symbolic reference to the traditional culture of the past. They can be played, and be played 'meaningfully,' for that reason alone. But the festivals are also inextricably bound up with the system of modern Anglo-American sports, inevitably in their organizational format, and also, but only partly, in terms of the forms of achievement orientation actualized during the proceedings. The Dene Games, however, are more closely aligned with the traditional form than the Northern Games, in this respect, in that the organizational format, intended to produce a disposition towards competition and winning, is frequently subverted. It is this implicit efficacy of 'bush consciousness' which positions the structures of signification produced at the Sahtu Dene Games and the Rae/Edzo Regional Dene Games in contradistinction to those of the system of competitive sports. It may well be that the teams from Fort McPherson and Arctic Red River who are preparing to attend the 1995 Sahtu Dene Games in Fort Good Hope, will find the event's true traditionality in this implicit efficacy of bush consciousness.

Endnotes

- 1 See, for example, the damning criticism by E. Corbett, who had been a teacher at the school in 1944 (PAC, RG 10/vol 6476/file 919/1/part 1, Corbett to Mackenzie, 13 March 1944). Principal Shepherd resigned at the end of March, in consequence of Corbett's intervention.
- 2 PAC, RG10/vol. 6471/file 903/1/part 1, Harvey to DIA, 3 July 1939.
- 3 PAC, RG10/vol. 6471/file 903/1/part 1, Dewdney to DIA, 19 February 1945. When Marjorie Hinds commenced her work at the school, she noticed Dewdney's claim to have been somewhat exaggerated (see, *School House in the Arctic*).
- 4 PAC, RG10/vol. 6471/file 903/1/part 1, Dewdney to Gibson, 21 August 1945.
- 5 PAC, RG10/vol. 6471/file 903/1/part 1, Flemming to Neary, 13 November 1946, 19 November 1946.
- 6 NWT, G88/004, Macpherson Collection, S.J. Bailey, Report on Indian Day School, Fort McPherson, 17 October 1950.
- 7 See, for example, Charlie Snowshoe's eloquent testimony (MVPI, *Transcripts of Proceedings at Inquiry*, v. 147, pp. 22527-33).
- 8 Mitsuro Shimpō & Cynthia Struthers, Dene Education Survey Project. A Preliminary Report Prepared for the Fort McPherson Indian Band, p. 5.
- 9 See, Mark Dickerson, *Whose North*, p. 128 ff.
- 10 Sarah Jerome & Mary Effie Snowshoe, "Chief Julius School," p. 313.
- 11 See, Perti Pelto, *The Snowmobile Revolution*, for a general discussion of this development.
- 12 In 1993, a teenage girl was killed in a skidoo accident in Inuvik.
- 13 PAC, RG10/vol. 6471/file 903/1/part 1, Flemming to Neary, 13 November 1946.
- 14 PAC, RG10/vol. 6471/file 903/1/part 1, Flemming to DIA, 30 June 1948.
- 15 NWT, G88/004, Macpherson Collection, Margery Hinds, Fort McPherson 1948-1949.
- 16 See, for example, NWT, G88/004, Macpherson Collection, W.G. Devitt, Evaluation of Educational Progress in the Northwest Territories in the Past Decade, 25 February 1964, p. 1.
- 17 NWT, G88/004, Macpherson Collection, J.V. Jacobson, *School Bulletin for Northwest Territories Schools*, 1 (1952), p. 7.
- 18 NWT, G88/004, Macpherson Collection, J.V. Jacobson, *School Bulletin for Northwest Territories Schools*, 1 (1952), p. 20.
- 19 NWT, G88/004, Macpherson Collection, Educational and Vocational Training Programme in the Mackenzie District, 1955, p. 7.
- 20 NWT, G88/004, Macpherson Collection, Advisory Meeting on the Curriculum: Review of Aims and Objectives of Education in the NWT, 11 November 1960.
- 21 CGLP, L50/4, Charles Koe, *For the Future*; see also, CGLP, L50/1, Charles Koe, *Today's People*; CGLP, L52/3, *A Long Time Ago*, #3; CGLP, L49/7, Roddy Peters, *Fort McPherson Loucheux Indians in the 1940s*; CGLP, L1/5, James Simon, *Peel River Chiefs*.
- 22 GLCC, OT114/NG9, William Nerysoo, Traditional Gwich'in Games.
- 23 NWT, *Elementary Education in the Northwest Territories*.
- 24 See, NWT, G88/004, Macpherson Collection, Inuit Tapirisat of Canada, *The Future of Arctic Education*, 1972.
- 25 These developments were entrenched in a number of subsequent documents; see, NWT, *Learning: Tradition and Change*; NWT, *Our Students, Our Future*; NWT, *Education in the Northwest Territories*.
- 26 NWT, *Junior/Senior High School Curriculum, Physical Education*, p. 1.
- 27 NWT, *Dene Kede. Education: A Dene Perspective*.
- 28 NWT, *Dene Kede. Education: A Dene Perspective*, pp. 192-195, 199.
- 29 Between 1969 and 1981, at least six students from Fort McPherson, four students from Aklavik, and one student from Arctic Red River attended the Teacher Education Program offered at the Thebacha campus of Arctic College at Fort Smith (NWT, G88/004, Macpherson Collection, file "TEP").
- 30 See, Lutra Associates, *Lessons For All*, for a statistical examination of this and related problems.

- 31 Nobody professes to be completely sure as to just who introduced the game, but there appears to exist a speculative consensus that it was either the personnel of the hostel or of the nursing station
- 32 "He had time on his hands, and a very small flock of people," as Gerry Glassford, one of the principal researchers of the subsequent TEST program, put it.
- 33 Elizabeth Eso, Report on Phase II of a Proposal to Reactivate the Old Crow Ski Program; R.Gerald Glassford et al., Territorial Experimental Ski Training Program. Research Results 1971-1972, Appendix G.
- 34 A detailed delineation of TEST's organizational history has been provided by Vicki Paraschak (Discrepancies Between Government Programs and Community Practices, pp. 66-72). The present discussion will be limited to a discussion of TEST's implications with regard to the imposition of the performance principle.
- 35 Bjorger Petterson, *Story of TEST*, p. 1.
- 36 TEST Board of Directors, Presentation to Recreation Canada, p. 4.
- 37 See, Edward Bennington, Participation in Sports Programs as a Vehicle of Acculturation.
- 38 R.Gerald Glassford et al., Territorial Experimental Ski Training Program. Research Results 1971-1972, p. 48 ff.
- 39 J.M Mouchet, Outline of a Proposal to Activate the Old Crow Ski Program; Elizabeth Eso, 'Cross-Country Skiing Is Not a Sport, It Is a Way of Life.'
- 40 John Partington et al., Effects of the Territorial Experimental Ski Training Program in Tulita.
- 41 HSFC, Earle Olson, Fort McPherson Ski Club and Program.
- 42 Harvey Scott, personal communication; Gerry Glassford, personal communication. Federal funding for the program stopped in 1975, after which time NWTG took over the funding responsibility. After complaints by other NWT sports associations who demanded similar support, the program effectively merged with the NWT Ski Association. By 1982, TEST had sunk into the oblivion of lax accounting procedures and an annual grant paid on its behalf to the NWT Ski Association (Vicki Paraschak, Discrepancies Between Government Programs and Community Practices, pp. 68-72).
- 43 In some countries of Western Europe, for example, where sports and high performance athletics are not connected to the school and university system in any way, such a form of interconvertibility would appear to be far less obvious.
- 44 Information provided by Gerry Glassford has been used extensively in this section.
- 45 See, Ruth Carroll, "Loucheux Games!" *Tetlit Tribune*, 20 February 1976; "Old People Share Their Knowledge," *Inuvialuit*, 4 (1976), pp. 14-15.
- 46 NWTG, Sport & Recreation, 25/500/50, Harvey Scott, Evaluation System for Cultural Festivals: Loucheux Festival and Workshop, 4 March 1976.
- 47 Harvey Scott, personal communication.
- 48 NWTG, Sport & Recreation, 25/500/50, Harvey Scott, Evaluation System for Cultural Festivals: Loucheux Festival and Workshop, 4 March 1976.
- 49 YTA, PAM 1976/35, Neil E. Pascal, Loucheux Games Program.
- 50 YTA, PAM 1976/35, Neil E. Pascal, Loucheux Games Program.
- 51 At the 1992 Arctic Winter Games in Whitehorse, however, some of the best stick gamblers came from Old Crow.
- 52 Vicki Paraschak, Discrepancies Between Government Programs and Community Practices, pp. 45-66.
- 53 See, R. Gerald Glassford, *Application of a Theory of Games*.
- 54 James Ross, *Dinjii Zhuh Dene Games*.
- 55 Nellie Courmoyea, in, Official Program of the 2nd Annual Northern Games, Inuvik, 23 - 25 July 1971.
- 56 NWTG, Sport & Recreation, 25/500/41, Dennis Adams, Northern Games: Recommendations and Observations, October 1975.
- 57 The parallel to the orientation of TEST and to the focus of educational work at the mission school is obvious.
- 58 See, Vicki Paraschak, Discrepancies Between Government Programs and Community Practices, pp. 64-70.
- 59 NWTG, Sport & Recreation, 17/249/000, Roland Gosselin, Memo to File, 31 May 1979.
- 60 NWTG, Sport & Recreation, 25/500/050, Gordon Yakeleya to Nick Sibbeston, 26 September 1986.
- 61 NWTG, Sport & Recreation, 17/228/000, Dene Games Association, Certificate of Incorporation, 1 May 1981.
- 62 NWTG, Sport & Recreation, 25/500/032, George Grandjambe, Fort Good Hope Dene Traditional Games Research Project, Proposal.

- 63 Rene Lamothe compiled a fairly extensive set of notes at this workshop (NWTG, Sport & Recreation, Rene Lamothe, Notes and Descriptions of Sahtu Dene Traditional Games).
- 64 Jeff Summers, Johnny Weyallon & Chris Zoe, Fort Smith/Mackenzie 1991 Regional Dene Summer Games, Rae/Edzo. Evaluation and Final Report.
- 65 James McAra, personal communication.

CHAPTER 9

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In May of 1994, a plan was conceived to organize a traditional games workshop at Arctic Red River. The Recreation Coordinator invited me to act as a resource person. I faxed a list of the traditional Gwich'in games which I had learned about, to Arctic Red River, for review and comments by interested old-timers. The games were to be demonstrated and played at a location a little way up the Arctic Red. Faxes and phone calls were exchanged during the subsequent weeks, and a date was finally decided on. I was just about to make arrangements for the trip, when I received a call from Arctic Red indicating that it would be impossible to hold the workshop at the assigned time, and that it would have to be postponed. At this point, there are no plans to reschedule the event.

That there is, in general, an undercurrent of interest in the old-time games even today was also brought home to me by the visitors dropping by at the place where I was staying in Fort McPherson. Word had gotten around that I had brought in a collection of photos taken at the traditional games workshop in 1976, and a considerable number of people dropped by, greatly interested in browsing through the photos. It was at about the same time that consideration was given to the idea of bringing Hyacinthe Andre from Arctic Red into the class room at Fort McPherson, for a demonstration of drumming and the hand game. A week later, I was to have presented my research to the adult education class. Ultimately, none of these plans could be realized.

These incidents indicate that interest in the old form is easily generated, but at present this does not translate into concrete, sustained activities to actually reactivate it. It requires the signifying power of games-festivals or the pragmatic intent of a workshop to transform the expression of interest into practical activity. When I first learned about the games-festivals, I considered them, in a strategic sense, to be a forum well suited for a reactivation of the old form; this was no doubt due to my own familiarity with, and acceptance of, the structures of signification of formally similar events beholden to the practical logic of the field of sport. I am no longer convinced of the appropriateness of the strategy. As I have attempted to bring out in the analysis, the organizational format brings to bear, implicitly as often as by design, the forms of valorization of the field of modern

sports. One of the *raison d'être* of this field in its present institutionalized state is the facilitation of interpersonal comparison qua competition. A division into leagues and age groups, and discrimination based on relative performance, gender, and age, create the state of initial equality ostensibly necessary to make interpersonal competition 'meaningful.' Medals, prizes and championships are the symbolic forms of expression emanating from this principle, attesting to, and producing, this meaningfulness. Following Eichberg, I have referred to this process as the gradual imposition of the 'performance principle.'

These significations are not necessarily congruent with the forms of valorization produced by the traditional games in the contact-traditional setting; this has been discussed in some detail in Chapter 4. Thence my concern relative to the organizational format of festivals such as the Sahtu Dene Games and the Regional Dene Games, but it must stand as a testimony to the traditional form's resiliency that residual aspects of 'bush consciousness' remain efficacious even at the moment of articulation of the two forms. 'Bush consciousness' is the term used to refer to the dispositions actualized by games when they were played in the contact-traditional setting. By virtue of their close integration with the field of subsistence production, a largely cooperative and communal venture, the competitive, comparative aspects of games were overdetermined by cooperative behavior related to the economic field. At the level of the habitus, i.e., of the personal dispositions of 'bush consciousness,' this tendency was expressed as an avoidance of explicit valorizations attached to differential performance. This tendency found formal expression in the field of games such that, in some instances, it was written into the very rules of the activity—in the form of a leveling principle referred to as the 'circular challenge order.' This principle negated the discrimination into age and performance groups which orders the logic of practice of the field of modern sports.

At the formal level, then, the activities of the two fields are quite similar, if not identical (for example, soccer or wrestling), but they give expression to a distinctly different logic of practice, respectively. It is in this context, endeavouring to analytically understand the articulation of these ostensibly not so dissimilar domains of practice—both being concerned with physical activity—that I see the utility of Bourdieu's notion of fields and the habitus. Bourdieu suggests that not only are social systems constituted of different fields (which are themselves structured by relations of power), but that furthermore the properties of a given phenomenon can only be understood in terms of the distinctiveness which positions it with regard to other phenomena with which it is linked in systems of structured relations. The distinctive position of the traditional games in their present condition can not be understood without a consideration of the reach of effects of the field of contemporary sports. It is these effects which are expressed when an educator at Fort McPherson argues that the best form of presentation of the traditional form is to play them in the competitive format of modern sports. The teams from Fort McPherson and Arctic Red River who are



Lorne Smith

Illustration 16 *Nehkak Cho*

George Robert makes a Gwich'in football,
traditional games workshop Fort McPherson, 1976

making plans to attend the Sahtu Dene Games in Fort Good Hope in August 1995 will enter an event which is situated at the interface of these competing structures of signification.

The penetration of the organizational aspects of the field of sports into the north was initiated at the mission school in Hay River, and, though somewhat less directed, at July 1 and July 4 festivals at Dawson City, during the Klondike gold rush. It was reinforced during 'Founder's Day' and moved from the mission school to Fort McPherson as 'Sports Day.' This process was by and large initiated by people who had little awareness of the traditional form. They brought to bear their own experiences and their own knowledge. They actualized the different forms of social and cultural capital at their disposal, that is to say, they exerted power in the imposition of cultural values which they brought with them into the north. Until not too long ago, this was also true of many teachers and recreation programming experts. It is no coincidence that the Dene Games festivals and the Northern Games are organized in a format modelled on that of the Olympic Games; neither is it the result of sinister intent. This invocation of structures of signification derived from the ideology of the Olympic movement was familiar to those who originally conceived the programs, and these structures of signification were intended to express the events' remedial and ameliorative

intent amid cultures beset with serious social problems. It is here that Bourdieu's notion of the different forms of capital existing as media and resources mobilized in struggles in the various fields, can usefully be employed.

The format and structure of the Northern Games and the Dene Games, and earlier, of the Territorial Experimental Ski Training program, were introduced through what Paraschak refers to as the 'hetero-transplantation' of the system of sports and of the performance principle, into the north, but this is not to say that the Gwich'in and Inuit did not understand what was being constructed on their behalf. Bourdieu somewhere makes the point that the exertion of power is most efficacious where the dominated have the aptitude to understand and comply with the language of power without being able to actively appropriate and deploy it. Power will then be exerted in the absence of direct coercion, and such power may well take the form of the recreation coordinator's technical manual. Dene and Inuit have been involved in TEST and the various festivals with the greatest interest, but it appeared that they were largely dependent upon outside technical experts. The conflicts over the exertion of authority have centered largely on allocating more power to Native organizers. The effects of the Teacher Education Program and the Recreation Leadership Program will ultimately result in a shift of influence, but with the exception of conflicts over the high performance focus of TEST, the principles of the construction of the field itself, have not been similarly contested. I found little dissent to the proposition that the organizational format of the Dene Games provided a proper stage for the traditional games. Dene are gradually shifting the balance of authority in the field of sport and recreation, but, as a result of gradual processes of 'hetero-transplantation' they are now so attuned to the organizational principles of the field of sport that they do not consider it necessary to challenge these principles themselves, that is to say, to alter the distributional properties of the field of sport and recreation. When I introduced myself and my research project to Nellie Cournoyea—she was then a government minister—who was selling muktuk at a food kiosk set up for the Northern Games, she remarked: "You are studying Dene games? That's good. They [the Dene] are not very organized. I think they could use a little help."

The potential of Bourdieu's conceptualizations to produce 'evidence effects' is thus considerable, but the same can most certainly not be said of the language he employs to communicate said effects. The impenetrability of his discourse has been commented on a number of times, and while, as Derek Robbins has phrased it, 'recognizing society' may indeed be his political project, his diction will see to it that little 're-cognition' will revert back to the social agents which are the subject and the object of analysis. This problem Bourdieu shares with much discourse analysis, and in my close adherence to his conceptualizations, I share it, for better or for worse, with Bourdieu. It is customary to bring back to the field the results accruing from one's research, and I will, at the completion of this project, send a number of copies of this study north, but I do remember well the story told me about the fate of the research carried out by a subarctic anthropologist. By way of getting some practical use out of the project, an old-timer gradually converted the copy of the the-

sis sent to him, into kindling for his woodstove. In a similar vein, reflecting on their own applied work carried out during the 1976 traditional games workshop, Harvey Scott and Gerry Glassford noted that "research for the sake of research does not hold a great deal of value in this context."¹ It was this concern with the practical results of field research, among other things, which motivated me to get involved in the documentation of traditional Dene games discussed in Appendix I. —

In 1992, the Teet'it Gwich'in signed a land claims agreement with the government of Canada. Among other matters, this agreement stipulates the gradual introduction of institutions of self-government. Devolution of control over the educational system is one of the points of the agreement. At this point in time, the Gwich'in have neither the manpower nor the managerial expertise to assume such control, but a first step in that direction has been made through the completion of the *Dene Kede* curriculum document to which the Dene can claim true and exclusive ownership. Present circumstances hold considerable potential for the future, but great challenges will have to be overcome in order to motivate the teenage generation to turn back to the Gwich'in language, and, one would hope, to the traditional games. In this latter respect, Gwich'in educators will perhaps consider the possibility of tying the old-time games closer to the land rather than organizing them in the gym or through festivals. It seems that the latter approach inevitably links the games closer to the practical logic of the field of competitive sports than is necessary. Personally, I think that a good strategy for the Gwich'in is not to get too organized in the reconstruction of their old-time games. The record, as Richard Mandell phrased it, has already been 'invented.' There is no need for more.

Endnotes

- 1 Harvey Scott & R.Gerald Glassford, Traditional Game Documentation as a Socio-Cultural Development Technique.

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APPENDIX I

DESCRIPTION OF TRADITIONAL GAMES

The descriptive rules of traditional Gwich'in games provided here are taken from Mike Heine, Ruth Carroll & Harvey Scott, *Traditional Dene Games*; most of the illustrations accompanying the original publication have been removed. The resource book is the result of research which extended over a period of almost twenty years. It was initiated with two traditional games workshops held in Fort McPherson and Fort Franklin in 1976. It was continued with a workshop in Fort Norman in 1985, and complemented by field research carried out by Harvey Scott, François Gravelle, and Michael Heine. A significant part of the results were compiled in two unpublished documents, in 1979: Harvey Scott & Bob Day, *Kutchin Games*; and Harvey Scott, *Hareskin / Bear Lake / Mountain Games*.

These documents had remained largely ignored. In initiating their inclusion into *Traditional Dene Games*, I have followed arguments advanced some twenty years ago by Harvey Scott et al. (*The Need for an Applied Socio-Psychology of Sport*) and attempted to derive some practical utility from the present study—it is evident that, for better or for worse, the study's language and forms of conceptualization have little relevance for the politics of culture presently unfolding in the North.

Traditional Dene Games is primarily intended to be used a resource rather than a rule book or manual, but the form of representation makes for an easy adaptation of the games to a competitive format. In this I have deviated from the editorial intent of the compilations produced by Scott and Scott & Day. I adapted the format at the suggestions of *Dene Games* organizers at the Sport & Recreation Division of NWTG, and after a discussion with a Gwich'in educator concerning the present structure of the field of traditional games (see page 175). Dene sports leaders in communities in the Mackenzie Valley and Deh Cho likewise appeared to make the implicit assumption that the end product would in some way be aligned with the competitive logic of the field of contemporary sports.

AKÀII — BOUNCING GAME

Idea of the Game

The bouncing game, *àkaii*, is reminiscent of both the modern trampoline and the more widely known Inuit blanket toss, but it was more difficult to play than either. The player jumped onto a small mooseskin blanket and attempted to perform as many jumps, or 'bounces,' as possible, before he was thrown off. The game was made more exciting by the fact that spectators could push down on the ropes by which the *àkaii* was suspended. This increased the height of the jumps and made it more difficult for the player to stay on the blanket.

Equipment

- 1 A tanned mooseskin folded over several times to make a square of about 30x30cm. In some stories the size of the *àkaii* is described to be about 60x60cm. The mooseskin should be at least triple-folded to provide the necessary strength. A strong tarp with grommets can be used instead.
- 2 Four strong nylon ropes, 6 - 8 m long each. If babiche ropes are used, they have to be at least 5 strand thick. Alternatively, two 15-20m long ropes can be used.
- 3 4 birch poles, ca. 2 m long and 3-5 cm round.

Playing Area

- 1 An open, level area delimited by 4 medium-sized spruce trees spaced roughly in a square 7.5-10m across. The trees should average 10-15cm at the butt and be 7.5-9m tall. Osgood says that the four trees formed a three meter square.

Teams and Players

- 1 Traditionally, this game is played by men and boys only. Women and girl do not take part. It is said that among the Gwich'in the women would play swing, instead.
- 2 This is a competition between individual players, not a team competition.

How to Play

Preparation

- 1 The four ropes are tied to the corners of the *àkaii*. In the old days, fist-size balls made of moss or round stones might be wrapped into the corners of the *àkaii*, around which the ropes were tied.
- 2 The ropes are tied to the four trees at a height of about 2 meters. For men, the *àkaii* is suspended in the air about 1-1.5m from the ground; the blanket can be lowered when young boys are playing.
- 3 To give the *àkaii* more bounce, the ropes can be tightened further by attaching a birch poles to each of the support ropes. The rope is twisted around both ends of the pole with a half-hitch.

- 4 Alternatively, 2 longer ropes can be tied diagonally to the trees. The *àkaii* is tied to the ropes at the point where the ropes intersect.
- 5 When the game is played in winter time, the participants may also put on their snowshoes before they jump onto the *àkaii*. This makes the game much harder to play.

Starting Position - Variation 1

- 6 The player *jumps* onto the blanket. Only players who manage to *jump* onto the blanket can participate.
- 7 In an even more difficult variation of the game, the player had to jump onto the blanket without touching it with his hands.
- 8 The spectators do not yet push down on the ropes.

Starting Position - Variation 2

- 9 The ropes are pulled inwards (downwards) by the spectators and other participants, in order to lower the *àkaii*. The player jumps onto the blanket and the spectators let go of the ropes. The player shoots upward immediately.

Movement

- 10 The player may stand on the blanket for a few seconds to regain his balance.
- 11 The spectators and the other participants begin to push down on the ropes, and the player will be propelled ('bounced') into the air.
- 12 Whenever the player lands on the blanket, the spectators push down on the ropes.
- 13 If the player on the blanket thinks he should be bounced higher, he can shout: "*Vizhi' dohchun!*", or "*Vizhi' dohchun yuunkagikhi!*", that is: "Pull harder!"

Duration and End of Bout

- 14 The player will jump higher and higher; it is said that in the old days good players jumped as high as 2.5m and more off the blanket. When the player finally loses his balance and tumbles off the blanket, the spectators and the other participants must catch him in order to prevent him from falling to the ground and injuring himself.

End of Competition

- 15 The participant with the greatest number of jumps is the winner.

Things to Consider

The *àkaii* can be a very dangerous game. It is absolutely necessary that a sufficient number of people are assembled around the blanket to catch a player who loses his balance.

In the early days, this game was played in the winter only. These days, it can also be played in the summer, but mats should be placed underneath the blanket. It is safer to play in the winter, when snow can be piled up in the area around the *àkaii*. A player tumbling off the blanket will land in the snow.

In the Old Days

This game was usually played in the winter after a successful hunt. Cornelius Osgood observed: "When many caribou have been killed, a chief or a rich man gives a feast of pounded meat mixed with grease. This is put into a caribou skin and allowed to freeze. after which everyone celebrates by eating it. When this is finished, the donor suggests playing some game and asks which it shall be. Everyone says the bouncing game." The men would then commence the game while some of the women surrounding the *àkaii* began to sing songs.

A medicine person's dream is said to be the origin of this game, and a very old story about Diniizhuk, who was a man with strong medicine powers, also involves the *àkaii*. Diniizhuk's brother and mother were staying with a group of Indians who intended to kill the brother by throwing him off the *àkaii*. Using his medicine power, Diniizhuk managed to arrive at the Indians' camp before *àkaii* was played. This happened in winter time, therefore Diniizhuk had to use his travelling snowshoes. Still wearing his snowshoes, he jumped onto the *àkaii* in his brother's place. Try as they might, the Indians were unable to throw him off. Having wearied the Indians out, Diniizhuk finally killed the other group's strongest wrestler in a wrestling match. This intimidated the Indians, and Diniizhuk returned home with his mother and brother.

BACKPACKING RACE

Idea of the Game

The 'Backpack Race' was a test of speed as well as of strength. Participants carrying backpacks filled with rocks attempted to outrun each other. This game could also be turned into a weightlifting contest: The participants did not run with their packs but competed to see who could lift the heaviest pack. Only the race is described here.

Equipment

- 1 A number of backpacks, one for each competitor. If not enough packs are available, the competition can be split up into rounds.
- 2 Rocks which are used to fill the backpacks. The filled backpacks should be of equal weight.
- 3 The weight of the filled packs used in the old days has not been recorded, but hunters bringing caribou or moose meat from a fresh kill to camp were known to be able to carry enormous loads, often 100 pounds or more.

Playing Area

- 1 An open, fairly level stretch of ground.
- 2 A start and a finish line are marked on the ground. The distance to be covered was between 70 and 170m.

Teams and Players

- 1 Traditionally, this game was played by boys and young men.

How to Play

Preparation

- 1 By themselves or with help from spectators or other participants, the competitors put on their packs.

Starting Position

- 2 The competitors line up at the starting line.

Movement

- 3 Upon a signal, they set off towards the finish line.

End of Race

- 4 The first runner to cross the finish line wins the race.

In the Old Days

A backpacking race is described in the story of Zheh Geet'it.

BASEBALL

Idea of the Game

Dene Baseball was similar to the English game of Rounders. It was played by two teams consisting of two players each, a batting and a fielding team. When a player on the batting team managed to bat one of the pitches into the playing field, she and her partner would try to score as many runs between the two bases as possible, before being tagged or thrown out. When running between the bases, each runner had to carry the bat along and touch her or his partner's bat when they met between bases. If they failed to do so, the run would be disallowed.

Equipment

- 1 For the bases, two bags made from moose or caribou skin, about 30x30cm in size, filled with moose or caribou hair, or with moss. A flat piece of wood may also be used.
- 2 One bat per player, usually made from spruce, shaped somewhat like a modern baseball bat, but being flat rather than round. It is about 90cm-1 m long.
- 3 A ball made from moose or caribou skin and stuffed with moose or caribou hair, or with moss. The diameter is about 6cm.

Playing Area

- 1 An open, fairly flat space. The playing field does not have a set, standard size. It extends as far as the players are able to bat the ball.

Teams and Players

- 1 This is a team game played by teams of two players each. Men and women play together; children form their own teams

How to Play

Preparation

- 1 The two mats or pieces of wood used as the bases are set up about 15 m apart.

Starting Position

- 2 The players of the batting team ('Team A') take their position in front of the two base mats.
- 3 The pitcher of 'Team B' takes up her position halfway between the two bases. Her partner acts as the catcher and positions herself behind the base where the batter of 'Team A' stands.

Movement

- 4 Using an underhand throw, the pitcher pitches the ball to the batter. There is no clearly defined strike zone, because the game is played without strike-outs. The pitcher continues throwing the ball until the batter hits it.

- 5 When the batter hits the ball, she starts towards the opposite base. Her partner takes off at the same time. They have to touch bats when they meet halfway down the base line. If the bats do not touch, the run will be disallowed.
- 6 While the pitcher and her partner attempt to retrieve the ball from the outfield, the partners on the batting team run back and forth, scoring runs. When they see that the other team have retrieved the ball from the outfield, they stop at the bases in order to avoid being tagged.
- 7 When the partners on the pitching team have retrieved the ball, they attempt to get one of the players of the batting team out by either tagging her with the ball, or by throwing the ball and hitting the player with it.

Duration of Round

- 8 The batter continues to bat until she or her partner is tagged or thrown out. Then her partner takes her turn. When both players have been tagged, the teams switch sides. Now, 'Team A' pitches and 'Team B' is at bat. When both players on 'Team B' have been tagged, the round is over.

Duration and End of Game

- 9 There is no set number of rounds to a game. The teams agree before the beginning of the competition on the number of rounds per game.

Things to Consider

If a sufficiently large room is available (for example, a gym), the game can also be played indoors. Dene Baseball players do not drop or throw away their bats when they take off after hitting the ball, thus reducing the likelihood of damaging the gym. Furthermore, because the ball used in Dene Baseball is stuffed with moss, or caribou or moose hair, it is much softer than a standard base- or softball.

In the Old Days

Some old-timers think that Dene baseball may have been introduced by the RCMP. On the other hand, it is clear that fairly early the game was already referred to as 'Indian Baseball' at the Anglican mission school in Hay River. Between 1905 and 1938, many children from the Sahtu, Deh Cho and Delta went to Hay River school. The game may well have been spread by children introducing it to their friends at the school.

In another version of the game, the batters running between bases would grab each other by the arms and throw each other around, instead of touching bats. The exact method of playing, however, has not been fully documented.

As early as 1913, a team from Ft. McPherson went to Arctic Red River to take on an Arctic Red River as well as an Eskimo team. In a letter to retired Archdeacon McDonald, Simon Tinzik of Ft. McPherson reported that the Teet'it Gwich'in team won both matches: "These boys always win."

This competition would have been a part of the annual trade meetings held during the summer when people came into town to await the arrival of the Hudson's Bay steamers 'Wrigley', 'Distributor', or 'Mackenzie'. The people began to arrive around mid-June and stayed for three or four

weeks until the arrival of the boat, usually in the first week of July. For a long time, this was the largest meeting of the year. The Eskimo would come down to Ft. McPherson, hold their traditional dances, and challenge the Gwich'in to competitions in soccer, baseball or wrestling. When the boat arrived, the trappers would trade their furs and get supplies for the fall caribou hunt. Soon after the boat had departed, everyone would leave for the bush or the coast.

BEAVER SHIN BONE

Idea of the Game

This was test of strength which involved an opponent only indirectly. Two competitors took turns attempting to twist or break apart a beaver shin bone. If both succeeded, they could then try their strength on bones which were more difficult to break, such as the leg bone of caribou, moose, or sheep.

Equipment

- 1 A shin bone of a beaver. It is boiled to clean it of fat, then wrapped in a piece of cloth. If the players want to try and break stronger bones, the following can be used (in order of difficulty):
- 2 A beaver thigh bone, cleaned of fat and wrapped in cloth.
- 3 A caribou leg bone; the hide is left on.
- 4 A moose leg bone; the hide is left on.
- 5 A sheep leg bone; the hide is left on.
- 6 The part of the leg bone used in all cases is that from the hoof to the knee joint.

Playing Area

- 1 No special playing area is needed for this game.

Teams and Players

- 1 This is a competition between individuals. No team contest has been documented.

How to Play

Preparation

- 1 The bones are prepared as described above.

Starting Position—Variation 1

- 2 The competitor grasps one end of the wrapped bone with his left hand. The hand comes to rest at the player's right collar bone. With his right hand, the player grasps the other end of the bone.

Starting Position—Variation 2

- 3 The competitor grasps one end of the wrapped bone with his right hand. The hand comes to rest at the player's left collar bone. With his left hand, the player grasps the other end of the bone.

Movement

- 4 Attempting to break the bone, the player applies steady pressure to it with his lower hand (right hand in Variation 1; left hand in Variation 2).

Duration of Competition

- 5 If both players succeed in breaking the bone, they can then attempt to do the following (listed in order of difficulty):

Beaver thigh bone (cleaned and wrapped in cloth)— break the bone.

Caribou leg bone (hide left on)— dislocate ankle.

Moose leg bone (hide left on)— dislocate ankle.

Sheep leg bone (hide left on) — dislocate ankle.

- 6 The last person remaining wins the competition overall. It has not been documented, how a tie between two competitors is resolved.

Things to Consider

The last three of the bones listed (caribou, moose, and sheep leg bone) are very difficult to break. Even a very strong person will have trouble with the sheep leg bone as it is so strong and supple. Occasionally, however, a strong player will succeed in breaking the leg bone of even these animals and the bone will sometimes even pierce the skin.

In the Old Days

In the Sahtu, this game was accompanied by gambling.

Among the Gwich'in, this test of strength was an important part of the medicine used in hunting. A person with the proper kind of hunting medicine could judge from the way the bone broke, where caribou would be found.

BOW AND ARROW

Idea of the Game

The object of the competition was to hit a target placed into the ground at a certain distance, and embed the arrow in it. Among the Gwich'in, the game was also played for distance: Each player attempted to shoot his arrows further than any of his competitors. The game was played between individual players. It could be played throughout the year, but in the winter the stick throw might be played instead.

Equipment

- 1 The preferred tree for the manufacture of a bow was a young willow. The bow shaft is 1.2-1.5m long. The bow string is made of twisted babiche. A wrist guard is fastened to the inner shaft of the bow. Arrows are of straight-grained spruce or birch, and are feathered with eagle or hawk feathers split lengthwise. For water animals, loon or similar feathers would be used instead, in the old days. Small animals such as rabbits and grouse were hunted with blunt arrows. Big game arrow heads were made of bone or antler.
- 2 If traditional bows are not available, modern selfbows can be used. A selfbow is a bow which is made from a single piece of wood.
- 3 One or several pointed arrows per player. When the game is played for distance, blunt arrows can be used.
- 4 One target stick.

Playing Area

- 1 An open and level area, large enough for shooting competition at distances of up to 300m.

Teams and Players

- 1 This is a competition between individuals; anybody can join. In the Sahtu, only men and boys played this game.

How to Play

Preparation

- 1 The target stick is put firmly into the ground.
There is great variation in the distances and the kinds of targets used by Dene for this game. Some of the distances reported were:
Among the Dogrib at Ft. Rae, a 2m long stick is put up as a target. The players shoot at it from a distance of about 10 m. A circular target, which is put up in a tree at a distance of about 150m, was also used at Ft. Rae.
At Rae Lakes, the target is put up at a distance of about 150m.
The Slavey at Nahanni Bute shoot at the trunk of willow, from a distance of about 60-70m.

- 2 The competitors decide on the shooting distance before the start of the match.

Starting Position and Movement

- 3 The players stand behind a line marked on the ground. They take turns shooting their arrows at the target. The closest shot wins. According to one account, each player had not one, but four attempt.
- 4 Among some Chipewyan people, a preliminary contest is sometimes used to establish who shoots first in the competition. All players attempt to shoot at the target while actually looking in another direction! The player with the best shot starts the actual round.

In the Old Days

Traditionally, this game was accompanied by betting. Each player gambled against some or all of the players in his line, but he could not win without his partner's cooperation who was playing on the opposite line. When a pair won a round, each player of the winning pair was paid by all the players against whom he gambled in his own line.

In winter time, people from Rae would travel out onto the Barrens to a meeting place where several groups had set up their tents. Bow and arrow shoot was one of the games played during these meets. Here also, the men would play for tobacco or ammunition. Broken or worn out arrows were burned in the fire.

Bow and arrow were not only used for the hunt, but also in war. To prepare for war, young men among the Gwich'in would sometimes run and try to dodge arrows aimed at them by their friends.

CARIBOU CHASE

Idea of the Game

'Caribou Chase' was a close imitation of the hunt. It was also known as 'Caribou Tag', 'Deerskin Chase', or 'Bear Chase.' The game could be played simply as a tag game where a group of 'hunters' pursued and attempted to catch (tag) a 'caribou', 'moose', or 'bear'. In a variation of the game, the hunters used spears and attempted to catch their prey by spearing a piece of moose or caribou skin dragged across the ground by the 'animal'. This version of the game is described here.

Equipment

- 1 A piece of caribou or moose skin, 15cm wide by 75cm long. The skin is tied to a line about 2m long.
- 2 One spear per player, about 1.5m long. Pointed willow or birch sticks can also be used.

Playing Area

- 1 An open, fairly level stretch of ground.

Teams and Players

- 1 Traditionally, this game was played by boys and young men.

How to Play

Starting Position and Movement—Variation 1

- 1 The player who is 'it' (the 'caribou', 'bear', or 'moose') takes the line, and, holding it in one hand, runs away from the hunters, dragging the mooseskin across the ground 2m behind him. The hunters pursue him and attempt to pin the mooseskin to the ground with their spears.

Starting Position and Movement—Variation 2

- 2 The hunters form two parallel lines, facing each other at a distance of 2 to 3 m.
- 3 Dragging the skin across the ground 2m behind him, the 'caribou' runs through the lines of hunters (Illustration 1).
- 4 The hunters attempt to pin the skin to the ground while the caribou runs past.

Duration and End of Competition

- 5 After a successful attempt, the line will slip out the player's hand. Another competitor now takes his place and is 'it'.
- 6 It has not been documented how the competition overall is decided, and there may not have been an overall winner. In the old days, a boy who succeeded in getting away from the hunters "was considered to be very smart" (Cornelius Osgood).

In the Old Days

This game, much as the other forms of running races, was considered to be an important part of the hunter's education, improving the physical skills required in the pursuit of moose and caribou. When it involved the use of the spear, it was probably the game most closely resembling the traditional hunt.

GWICH'IN FOOTBALL

Idea of the Game

Apart from shinny and Baseball, Football was the only field team sport played by the Gwich'in; it was not unlike the game of soccer. Two goals were set up at opposite ends of a playing field. The teams attempted to shoot the ball into the opposing team's goal, for a score of one point. In earlier days, the players were allowed to use their hands in addition to their feet, but this is not done today. The game was played throughout the year.

Equipment

- 1 A ball made from mooseskin, diameter about 25-30cm. The ball is filled with moose hair or wet moss. It is made from two pieces of moose skin which are sewn together except for one seam. The ball is then turned inside out so that the stitches are on the inside. This gives the outer covering of the ball a smooth appearance.
- 2 Poles made from any kind of tree, about 1.5 m high and 3-5 cm thick, are used as goal posts.

Playing Area

- 1 A wide open, flat space. The goals are set up at the opposite ends of the playing area. The goal posts are about 4-6 m apart. The length of the playing field has not been documented, but the more players enter, the larger the field has to be.
- 2 Gwich'in on the Alaskan side playing the game in the Ft. Yukon area used only one goal.

Teams and Players

- 1 Each team consists of 12 to 14 players. Old reports indicate that more players could participate as long as each team fielded the same number of players.
- 2 Although this is considered to be a men's game, women occasionally played as well. It is not known whether a goal keeper was used traditionally.

How to Play

Preparation

- 1 The two goals are set up at opposite ends of the playing field.

Starting Position and Movement

- 2 The game is started in much the same way as shinny. Play begins when the ball was kicked from the centre of the playing field. The ball can also simply be thrown onto the ground and then everybody begins to run after it.
- 3 Each team attempts to kick the ball through the opponent's goal.
- 4 The ball can be picked up and kicked, but a player is not allowed to run with it.

- 5 Spectators or onlookers who wish to enter the game, can do so at any moment. Players can drop out or rejoin the team at any time, as long as both teams have approximately the same number of players on the field.

Duration and End of Competition

- 6 In one variation of the game, the team who first scores three goals won the game.
- 7 In another variation, teams agree to stop play after a set period of time. The team with the higher score wins the game.
- 8 Mostoften, the game will continue until everybody is wearied out.

Things to Consider

Traditionally, this game was played year-round. In winter time, shinny was often played instead.

In the Old Days

One of the earliest references to the game can be found in the journal kept by the Bay trader Alexander Murray at Ft. Yukon in Gwich'in country. He noted that during a game played on Christmas Day 1848, one player injured one of his toes so severely that he had to drop out of the match.

At Ft. McPherson, Dene football was the favorite game during the great meeting which was held when everybody waited for the arrival of the Hudson's Bay steamer coming down the Mackenzie on its annual summer run. The Inuit travelled to Ft. McPherson from the coast, and the old rivalry between the Gwich'in and the Inuit was played out on the football field: A great match between Inuit and Gwich'in teams was one of the highlights of the meet. The teams played for a prize put up by the Teet'it Gwich'in chief, consisting of tobacco bought at the Bay store. Usually, the Gwich'in won this match because they had been prepared by Old Man John Firth, the Bay trader at Ft. McPherson, Rampart House and LaPierre House for many years. Having come to Gwich'in country from Scotland, he knew a little bit about the game himself. Jim Koe remembers: "My favourite game was football; the way my people used to play it in McPherson during the summer time. Them days people always had fun with different Indian games". While the men's teams played against each other, the Gwich'in women would also challenge the Inuit women to a match.

The head of Twelvemile Creek was a favorite playing field for Gwich'in living in the Blackstone area between Ft. McPherson and Dawson City.

This could be a rough game indeed. The adventurer Andrew J. Stone described how the game was played among the Gwich'in at Ft. McPherson in the winter of 1899:

"An oval shaped bag stuffed with caribou or moose hair answers for a ball, and when it is thrown on the ground, old and young, male and female, go after it, kicking and cuffing it, knocking each other down, and indulging in a general rough and tumble time of it, without any systems or rules for playing. It matters not what happens, no one ever seems to get mad and all seem to get an equal amount of fun out of the game. To see them, all ages, dressed in skins in uniform style, out on the ice and snow chasing the football, is a picturesque winter scene."

HOOP AND POLE

Idea of the Game

This game was somewhat similar to the ring and pin game, of which it was a larger- scale version. The descriptive English name of the game was coined by Stewart Culin. The player threw a spear, or shot or throw an arrow at a hoop which was rolled along the ground. The count was determined by the way in which the dart or arrow hit the ring. The game was played throughout the year. After freeze-up, it could be played on the ice of a river or lake.

Equipment

- 1 A willow hoop, about 60cm in diameter.
- 2 A number of arrows or spear, one per player. Preferably, the spears, like the hoop, were made of willow, but other trees might also be used. Most commonly, the spear or arrow was between 80 and 90cm long. It was sometimes decorated with eagle feather.

Playing Area

- 1 Any open level space will do. In the winter, the game is played on the frozen ice of a river or lake. Rougher ground can be chosen to make the game more difficult.

Teams and Players

- 1 Boys and young men only play this game.
- 2 The game is played between individuals. No team contest has been documented.
- 3 One player has to roll the hoop out onto the playing field.

How to Play

Preparation

- 1 The players stand in one line to the side of the player who rolls the hoop. The players raise their spears or arrows, ready to throw them at the target.

Starting Position and Movement—Variation 1

- 2 The hoop is rolled out into the playing area. The players remain in line, and, while the hoop passes along the row of competitors, they attempt to throw their arrow or spear through the hoop.

Starting Position and Movement—Variation 2

- 3 The hoop is rolled out into the playing area. The participants walk or run along after the hoop and attempt to throw their arrow through it.
- 4 While the hoop is rolling, the players have to maintain a minimum distance from the rolling hoop. This has not been documented, but the participants can agree on this before the competition begins.

Duration and End of Competition

- 5 Each participant takes a turn at rolling the hoop out onto the playing field. The competition is over when everybody has taken his turn.
- 6 The player with the highest number of hits wins the competition.

Things to Consider

The difficulty of the game can be increased by choosing rougher, not level ground. The hoop will bounce while rolling along the ground, thus being much harder to hit. Likewise, the diameter of the hoop can be decreased; this will make the target smaller and therefore more difficult to hit.

A variation of this game was played in the spring just after break-up when the rivers flow swiftly. Instead of a willow ring, a willow globe was used. It consisted of two willow hoops, one lashed into the other at a roughly right angle. The globe was thrown into the swift-moving water, and the boys would run along the banks, attempting to catch the globe by throwing out wooden hooks attached to hand-lines made of babiche.

In the Old Days

The game in its two forms served a variety of purposes related to the traditional hunting economy. It increased the boys' agility and sureness of aim, and also trained them in the proper use of the spear and arrow. The game was played by the Van Tat and, on the Alaskan side, the Neets' aii people, but apparently not by the Teet' it and Gwichyah people.

LEAD GAME

Idea of the Game

The Lead Game, also called the 'Button Game', was similar to the Ring Toss, and not unlike the Coin Toss as it is played today. A small hole dug into the ground provided the target. The players stood back a certain distance and attempted to throw little pieces of lead into the hole.

Equipment

- 1 A stick, about 20cm long. It can be used as a target instead of a hole in the ground.
- 2 Small pieces of lead which the players attempt to throw into the hole. In the old days, lead shot from muzzle loaders was flattened down to the desired size and thickness. They were marked on one side with an 'X'. Small rocks, marbles or coat buttons can also be used; they have to be marked in the same way. In one version of the game played around Ft. Rae, each player would play with two or even three pieces of lead, that is, each player had several attempts per round.

Playing Area

- 1 An open, fairly flat space.

Teams and Players

- 1 Among the Dogrib, this game was played by young boys and men; four to six players appears to have been a common number. When played by men, it was accompanied by gambling. Among Gwich'in on the Alaskan side, on the other hand, the girls also played, using buttons which they referred to as 'their babies'.
- 2 The game was played between individuals. It has not been documented as a team game.

How to Play

Preparation

- 1 To make a target, a small hole of about 5cm diameter is dug into the ground. In summertime, a stick is put into the ground instead.
- 2 A throwing line is marked out at a distance of about 3 m from the hole. In another account, the distance was stated to be 10m.

Starting Position and Movement

- 3 The players line up behind the throwing line. They take turn attempting to throw their lead piece or pieces into the hole.

Duration and End of Round

- 4 Various ways of determining the winner of a round have been recorded. Firstly, the player whose chip is closest to the stick or hole (or landed in the hole), wins all the chips; or:

- 5 The player with the best throw chooses the blank side or the side marked with the 'X'. He then flips all the chips into the air, and collects all those which land with the side up he chose. The player with the second best throw then flips the remaining chips, and so forth, until all the chips have been collected.
- 6 If several players are successful in throwing their chips into the hole (that is, the round ends in a tie), these players enter a 'play-off' round; all other players leave their chips on the playing field and drop out of that round.

End of Competition

- 7 The players agree before the beginning of play on the number of rounds they want to play.
- 8 To keep the competition going, a successful player would sometimes lend back a number of chips to an unsuccessful player who had lost all his chips. This gave the second player an opportunity to win back some of his own chips.

Things to Consider

Today, this game is also played with coins (25cents or \$1), and the stakes can be quite considerable.

In the Old Days

It may appear that not much was at stake in this game when lead pellets were played for, but it will be remembered that in the old days, ammunition was hard to come by. It was traded by the Hudson's Bay trader in small parcels, and it was not uncommon for a Dene hunter to reload a spent cartridge. This was cheaper than having to trade for new ones from the Bay or Northern store.

MITTEN GAME

Idea of the Game

The Mitten Game is one of the few guessing games traditionally played by the Gwich'in and other groups of the Dene. Any number of people could play. The players sat down in a tight circle, each player's legs touching the legs of the player on both sides. One player was 'it'. He or she stood in the centre of the circle and tried to guess the location of a mitten which the players in the circle passed between their legs.

Equipment

- 1 Just one mitten is needed for this game. A moccasin can also be used.

Playing Area

- 1 Any space large enough to accommodate the circle of players is adequate. This used to be an indoor game.

Teams and Players

- 1 Everybody joins in this game.
- 2 One player is selected to be 'it'. He or she stands in the centre of the circle of players.

How to Play

Preparation

- 1 The players sit down in a tight circle with their legs semi-flexed and touching the legs of the player on either side. The players have to sit close enough for the mitten to be hidden by their legs when they pass it back and forth along the circle.

Starting Position and Movement

- 2 The players begin to pass the mitten back and forth between their legs.
- 3 Swaying to and fro as they pass the mitten along, the players in the circle sing a song. Whether or not this used to be a special 'mitten song' has not been documented.

Duration

- 4 The player in the middle attempts to locate the mitt. If he or she catches it, the player he catches takes the place in the middle.
- 5 This is not a competitive game. People can join in or leave the circle when they feel like it.

Things to Consider

A similar game from the Delta is called 'mush'. In this game, the people in the circle slap the floor under their knees as they pass the mitten. If 'It' in the centre turns his back to the person with the mitt, he or she gets hit on the behind with it.

MOOSESKIN BALL

Idea of the Game

This game, variously known as 'Moose-skin Ball,' 'Slavey Handball,' or 'Keep- Away Ball,' resembles a combination of volleyball and handball. Two teams fought for possession of a moose-skin ball by passing the ball from player to player. The ball must not touch the ground. This was a fun game played during the long days of summer. The whole community participated—women, men and children. The game could be carried on for hours at a time. No score was kept, and there were neither winners nor losers. The men and boys tried to keep the ball up in the air. The women and girls tried to bring it down.

Equipment

- 1 A ball of 3.5 - 5 cm diameter which fits neatly into the hand. It is made of tanned moose or caribou hide and stuffed with moose hair or wet moss.

Playing Area

- 1 A relatively open and level playing area.

Teams and Players

- 1 As it was played until quite recently around Sahtu, among the Van Tat Gwich'in and elsewhere among the Dene, women, men and children all played this game for hours during the long summer days.
- 2 Usually, the women and girls play against the men and boys.

How to Play

- 1 There really are not very many rules to this game. Usually, the men and boys start the game by playing the mooseskin ball back and forth. They are only allowed to bat or volley the ball, they may not grab it, hold on to it or throw it. The women and girls may grab it and run with it or throw it.
- 2 When one of the women or girls has grabbed the ball and runs with it, the men and boys will pursue her and try to wrestle the ball away from her. Sometimes when the players from the men's side catch up with her, a wrestling match for possession of the ball will occur—'everybody is piled up in one place.' If he succeeds in taking the ball away from her, he immediately has to volley it to one of his team mates.
- 3 When the ball hits the ground, the first player to get there can pick it up, but if the player is from the men's side, he immediately has to volley the ball to one of his team mates.

Things to Consider

Any number of players per side will do, as long as the teams are more or less evenly matched. The game can be carried on as long as enough people participate.

In the Old Days

This could be a very rough game. In the Sahtu, the women were noted for being very rough on the men—often taking them down to take away the ball:

"The evenings were long because it was spring and the women and girls would join the men and boys to play ball. The ball was made from a piece of moose-skin filled with soft moss and sewed tight, not much bigger than an egg. To start the game, the men threw the ball to each other, while the women and girls tried to get hold of it. If the women got it, they tried to hold on to it and the men tried to get it back. When a strong woman got the ball, the fighting to get it out of her hand could go on for a long time. Everybody would be piled up in one place, women and men all mixed up together." (George Blondin)

This was the same kind of strength required in working mooseskin, wringing it out after it had soaked in the brain mush. Mrs. Mary Francis described the work necessary: "To drain all the blood from the skin, the next day it is twisted until the water is all drained from the skin. Then it is put back into clean water again and left in for a few hours. Then it is twisted and twisted. Pull on it and it is put into a tight, twisted ball (it is very strong work—you have to use all your strength when you are wringing and squeezing the water out from the skin)."

The trapper Poole Field describes the game as he observed it at Mountain chief Jim Pelisea's [Pelissey] meat camp in 1905: "They also had a hand ball game in which everybody joined, men, women and children. They chose sides and the idea was to pat [volley] the ball from one to the other, and whichever side could keep the ball the longer, won."

At Ft. Yukon, Gwichaa Gwich'in played the game on New Years' Day, in front of the chief's house.

J.A. Mason observed the game among the Chipewyan: "... there was a game of batting the ball with the hands. When it fell to the ground, all scrambled for it. Men and women played; there were no goals and the game seems to have been an indiscriminate, unorganized amusement."

POLE PUSH

Idea of the Game

Two teams grasped the opposite ends of a spruce or pine pole. Each team attempted to push the other out of a marked area, a square or circle. The bout ended when one team succeeded in pushing the centre of the pole across the boundary marker. The Gwich'in and the people in the Sahtu played the game in a similar way.

Equipment

- 1 A dry spruce or pine pole, ca. 20cm in diameter. The diameter should not be less than 20cm to reduce the danger of breakage. The length of the pole depends on the number of players on each side. At the Ft. Franklin Dene Games Workshop in 1976, the elders from Colville Lake suggested 4-5 players per side and a length of 9-11 m for the pole. It can be shorter, if there are fewer participants. The pole's surface has to be carefully smoothed to avoid injuries. The centre of the pole is marked with a circle.
- 2 Masking tape or spray paint; a bright color is preferable. Nylon ropes or babiche to rope off the playing area.
- 3 The players may wear mitts or gloves.

Playing Area

- 1 The playing area can be a square of 8 m length or a circle of 10 m diameter. The area can be marked on the floor with masking tape, or, if played outside, marked on the ground with the spray paint.
- 2 The centre line of the square or the centre of the circle is marked on the ground with the spray paint or masking tape.

Teams and Players

- 1 The minimum number for this game is three players on each side; any number greater than this can also participate. Four players on each side was sometimes mentioned as a good number. If teams with a greater number of players participate, the length of the pole has to be adjusted accordingly. In old-time stories only the men's game is mentioned, but at the Sahtu Dene games workshop in Ft. Franklin in 1976, the women also played this game.

How to Play

Start

- 1 Each team grasps the opposite ends of the pole, facing the centre towards the opposing team. The centre mark of the pole is aligned with the centre mark of the playing area, which has been marked on the ground with tape or spray paint.
- 2 The teams begin to push upon the signal: "3-2-1-push!"

Movement

- 3 The teams push forward on the pole, attempting to push each other out of the marked area.
- 4 The pole is held no higher than the shoulder and no lower than the hip.
- 5 The teams must push forward at all times. They may not swing sideways, or make a sudden sideways movement. In either case, the infraction will be penalized with the loss of the bout.
- 6 A team may not move up on their end of the pole in order to avoid being pushed out of bounds. A team doing so will be declared loser of the bout.

Duration

- 7 Usually, it will not be necessary to set a time limit on a bout. The participating teams may do so prior to the start of the competition.

End of Bout

- 8 The bout ends when one team succeeds in pushing the pole's centre marker forward across the boundary of the playing field.

Things to Consider

If only a few teams participate, a best of three, double elimination format can be used. If many teams compete, this can be changed to, best of three, single elimination, or to single elimination.

In the Old Days

Traditionally, the organization of the pole push was similar to that of the stick pull. The losing team stepped out of the playing area. A fresh team immediately entered the competition, leaving little time for the winners of a bout to regain their strength.

Among the Mountain people, according to Gabe Etchinelle, the game might also be played between individuals.

Among the Gwich'in, according to an observation made by Strachan Jones in 1867, *niline' traha' kak* was played at the feasts, *gugwityinh*, held in honor of the death of an important person. In that same year, Bay man William L. Hardisty observed that on those occasion the pole push was played over a fire lit in the middle of the playing area. The player first in line on the stronger team thus had the 'privilege' of being warmed up quite thoroughly—a rather unusual motivation for winning this game!

RING AND PIN

Idea of the Game

The Gwich'in way of playing ring and pin differed only slightly from the one described before. Instead of a piece of caribou skin, the skull of a small animal such as a squirrel was sometimes used for the construction of the set. Also, the way of determining the winner differed somewhat.

Equipment

- 1 A needle made from caribou leg bone, about 5-8cm long (depending on the number of cones used) and 0.2cm in diameter.
- 2 Five pieces of caribou toe bone, carved into hollow cones, about 4cm long, and 2cm in diameter at the base. Gwich'in on the Alaskan side might use as many as eight or nine cones. They are hollowed at the base so that they fit into each other.
- 3 String made from babiche, just long enough for the player to be able to catch the bone closest to the needle; depending on the number of bones used, the string is from 15 to 25cm long.
- 4 A piece of caribou skin, about 15 cm long. A number of holes, slightly larger than the diameter of the bone needle, are punched through the skin.
- 5 The babiche is pulled through the cones, and tied to the needle with the base of the cones pointing towards the needle. The piece of caribou skin is tied to the other end of the string.
- 6 Only one set is required. It is passed from player to player.
- 7 Counting sticks. Each player receives an equal number. It has neither been documented how many sticks each player received, nor what type of wood the sticks would be made from.

Playing Area

- 1 No special playing area is required. The game can be played indoors as well as outdoors.

Teams and Players

- 1 When the game was accompanied by gambling, it was played by men only. At the Gwich'in games workshop held in Ft. McPherson in 1976, the women played this game also.
- 2 The game is played between pairs of players, or between groups of players with up to five players on each side.

How to Play

Preparation

- 1 The players sit down in a circle. If teams of players play, they sit down in rows, the players facing each other.

Movement

- 2 The first player grasps the needle at the point where it is tied to the string. With a flick of the wrist, he propels the cones and the piece of caribou skin into the air. He attempts to catch with the needle as many of the cones as he can (or the piece of caribou skin).

Duration

- 3 Each player has three attempts. He counts the points scored, then passes the set on to the next player in the group. Points are given as follows:

for each cone (regardless of position)1

catching the skin (1 hole)5

catching the skin (2 holes at once)10

- 4 The player adds the points scored in his three attempts. He receives from *each* player sticks to the amount of the total score of his three attempts, and passes the set on to the next player.
- 5 Players who lose all their counting sticks drop out of the competition.

End of Competition

- 6 The player who wins all the counting sticks is the winner of the competition overall.

Things to Consider

The number of counting sticks each player receives has not been documented but this can be a fairly difficult and lengthy game. Depending on the number of players taking part, it will not usually be necessary to start out with more than six to eight counting sticks per player.

In the Old Days

The game was often accompanied by gambling, but it is not known how the stakes were divided between the players.

RUNNING RACES

Idea of the Game

Running races were a common sport in all Dene cultures. The exact way of staging a race has not been documented, but it must for obvious reasons have been fairly similar to the way running races are held today. A number of participants started from behind a starting line and tried to outrace each other in reaching a visible landmark such as a tree or a creek. In winter time, snowshoe races were held instead.

A number of variations on the basic contest existed; among these are to be found the caribou chase, the backpack race, and the 'stake race.' These involved tests of strength or accuracy in addition to testing the athlete's speed and endurance. These variations are described in the subsequent sections.

Despite the incomplete documentation, the game must be included in this resource book because of its traditional cultural importance. Moving and travelling on the land were at the heart of Dene traditional culture, and running races were a special way to express this cultural orientation.

Equipment

- 1 For races held in the summer, no equipment is required. If the races are held in winter time, the competitors race on snowshoes.

Playing Area

- 1 Any ground is suitable for running races, although a flat course was probably used most often, in the old days.

Teams and Players

- 1 Men and boys race separately. No references to women's and girls' races have been found, but considering that the women had to perform most of the heavy work when the group travelled on the land, this kind of physical exercise would have been consistent with their life-styles. Thus it appears likely that they also would have staged races.
- 2 Running races are held throughout the year, summer and winter.

How to Play

Preparation

- 1 A starting line is marked on the ground or in the snow.
- 2 A clearly visible land mark located at a certain distance from the starting line, is defined as the finish.

The typical distance of a traditional running race in the very early days has been documented only once, for the Gwich'in. In a running race held at Peel River House (the old name of the Bay trading post at Ft. McPherson) in the winter of 1849, the runners started on the near bank

of the Peel River, crossed the river, turned around at the far bank and returned to the starting point on the near bank. They would have covered a distance of perhaps just under 1.5 km. The race was made more difficult by the fact that on that occasion the runners were not allowed to wear snowshoes.

Starting Position

- 3 The runners line up behind the starting line.

Movement

- 4 Upon a signal, everybody begins racing towards the finish line.

End of Race

- 5 The first runner to cross the finish line wins the race.

In the Old Days

Samuel Hearne, who of the many European explorers probably adapted his life style most closely to that of the traditional Dene, referred to the Chipewyan as "the greatest travellers in the known world". Andrew Jackson Stone said much the same about the Gwich'in when he noted them to be "quick, athletic, and among the best snowshoers and trippers of the north... their endurance is something wonderful. I have seen them run after a sled a distance of forty miles in a day, during which time they were in and out of deep snow, over rough going, through brush, on every side of the sled, back and forth". The Gwich'in thought of themselves as good long-distance runners, able to run very long distances, but not too fast. The Eskimo, on the other hand, are said to have been the faster runners, but they would only last shorter distances. Similar observations have been made in a number of other places.

Running races are often mentioned when old-timers talk about the old days. In fact a Chipewyan story dating back to the beginning of the world describes how day light was brought to the world (which then was as yet dark). Squirrel challenged Bear to a running race, and beat the bigger opponent despite all odds. Day light was the prize squirrel won for his efforts.

Stories from the different Dene cultures mention the fact that hunters wearing snowshoes were able to run down a moose or caribou on the crusted snow of late winter. Such pursuits could last up to a day or more. Because this long-distance endurance was so important for Dene in the old days, it was often connected to medicine power. In a story told around Sahtu, two runners challenged each other to a running race around Sahtu. The runner with the stronger medicine won the race, although he was the smaller person. Only those who led the right life could acquire the medicine power that helped a hunter to be a good runner. For example, John Fredson mentions some of the rules followed by Gwich'in on the Alaskan side: "Young men do not eat young moose. Children and young men do not eat the marrow of a calf moose. This is because it would make it hard for them to run, so they say."

People today travel in order to arrive at a destination, or in order to come home. By contrast, Dene in the old days felt only at home when they were travelling on the trail, moving on the land: "In those days people travelled all over the country...they were moving all the time. ... The people

enjoyed living on the land, going where there was game, always moving. They were happy in those days."(George Blondin)

Samuel Hearne put much the same into different words. For Dene, he said in 1771 after having travelled far and wide across the Barrens with Chipewyan chief Matonabee and his people, to "become so weak as to be incapable of travelling...is the most deplorable state to which a human being can possibly be brought."

STAKE RACE

Idea of the Game

The 'Stake Race' was a form of running race staged by Gwich'in in the Yukon and on the Alaskan side. It was a test of agility and balance rather than speed or endurance. A number of posts, or stakes, were driven into the bed of a river. The players attempted to cross the river by jumping from stake to stake.

Equipment

- 1 A number of stakes or poles, diameter about 7-10cm. The length depends on the depth of the river where the competition is held, the number on the river's width.
- 2 To make the game more difficult, the diameter of the poles can be decreased to about 5cm.

Playing Area

- 1 A fairly fast-moving stream is preferred for this game. The time after break-up, just when the ice has moved out of the rivers, is a good time to play this game.
- 2 The near bank of the river is the starting line, the finish line is on the far bank. If desired, start and finish can be marked out with lines on the ground.
- 3 It has not been documented how broad the river should be. Most likely, it would have been played on whatever river was close to camp.

Teams and Players

- 1 Traditionally, this game was played by boys and young men.

How to Play

Preparation

- 1 The stakes are driven into the river bed about 1.2m apart such that they extend about 15-20cm above the surface of the water.

Starting Position

- 2 The athlete positions himself on the near bank of the river.

Movement

- 3 Upon a signal he jumps from post to post, attempting to cross the river without falling into the river.
- 4 The run ends when the participants arrives on the far bank.
- 5 If a runner falls into the water, he will either drop out of the round, or he can attempt to get back up onto the pole that he missed, and finish his run. The competitors agree before the start of the competition which rule to follow.

End of Race

6 The fastest participant wins the competition.

Things to Consider

In the old days, Dene did not wear solid shoes with inflexible soles. Participating in the game wearing only moccasins would have made it much more difficult to keep one's balance.

In the Old Days

This game, in conjunction with other forms of running races, was considered to be an important part of the hunter's education, improving the physical skills required in the pursuit of moose and caribou.

SHINNY

Idea of the Game

Shinny was a winter game very similar to modern hockey. Two goals were set up on a convenient stretch of river or lake ice, and two teams attempted to shoot a puck made from wood, into the opposing team's goal. In many Native cultures this game was predominantly played by women, but among the Gwich'in men would play more often than women. In that the game involved extended periods of vigorous running, it fitted in well with the high degree of mobility characteristic of Dene culture.

Equipment

Shinny requires perhaps more specialized equipment than any other Dene game. Unlike other more specialized implements such as spears and arrows, which were used in games but also for other purposes, the shinny equipment is not used outside the game itself.

- 1 First, goals are needed. Posts are frozen into the ice at each end of the playing surface, about 90-100cm high, and about 2-2.5 m apart. If not enough smooth ice is available, somewhat narrower goals can be set up. The average distance between the two goals is 20-35 m.
- 2 The shinny stick is cane-shaped with a 20cm blade flattened on the sides. It has to be long enough for a player to be able to touch the ground with it, when running quickly.
- 3 A wooden puck. A 5cm segment is cut off from a spruce pole which is about 5cm wide. The edges are then rounded off to make it glide along the ice easier. This puck is obviously much thicker than the puck used in modern hockey.

Playing Area

- 1 An open, fairly flat stretch of river or lake ice.

Teams and Players

- 1 Everybody can take part in this game. It is played by men, women and children. According to another account, the game was predominantly played by boys and young men; women and girls would join in only occasionally.
- 2 This is a team contest.

How to Play

Preparation

- 1 The goal posts are frozen into the ice.

Starting Position and Movement

- 2 The game is started when two players in the center of the playing field go after the wooden puck on a signal given from a third person. They start the game facing one another with the

puck between them. The object of the game is to steer or shoot the puck through the opposing team's goal posts for 1 point.

- 3 For a goal to be counted, the puck must not pass higher than the goal posts.
- 4 After each point, the puck is again placed between two players in the middle.
- 5 To prevent the other team from scoring, each team positions one player between the goal posts who attempt to stop the puck from going through.

Scoring and End of Competition

- 6 The team scoring the higher number of points wins the game.
- 7 Another way to win the match is for one player to steer the puck through the opposing team's goal posts, and then take off with the puck by hitting it further and further away from the playing field. If the other team does not manage to catch him, he wins the game for his team (regardless of the actual score at that point). One account states that the player had to be caught within the first hundred steps after passing the goal line (perhaps 100-120m).

Things to Consider

This sounds almost like a description of the modern game of hockey (obviously without the skates), but it is certain, and the old-timers are adamant, that this game was played by the Dene before the whiteman arrived in the country.

In the Old Days

Shinny could be a very rough game. Old-timers say that it was one of the few games where Dene would get really mad at each other. People would hit each other with their sticks, and fights would sometimes break out. Injury often enough forced a player to leave the playing field.

SNOW SNAKE — VARIATION 1

Idea of the Game

'Snow Snake' is a strange name for a game which is played in a country where there are no snakes. The name was coined by Stewart Culin in his book, *Games of the North American Indians* (where he unfortunately lists only two old-time Dene games). The name is given here only in order to follow Culin's terminology which is widely used in traditional games documentations.

Snow Snake was similar to the spear throw, but can of course only be played in winter. It could be a test of strength and technique as well as accuracy: A stick the length of a spear or an arrow was hurled across a flat, snowy surface. The player whose spear glided the furthest won the competition.

Equipment

- 1 A number of arrows (or javelins), one per player. Preferably, they are made of birch or willow, but other trees may also be used. Most commonly, the 'snake' is between 60cm and 1.2m long, 1.5-2cm in diameter, pointed at one end and blunt at the other. Apparently, snakes 1.5m in length and more have also been used, but the preferred length was about 60-90cm.

Playing Area

- 1 A wide open, fairly flat space. If hit right, the 'snake' will travel up to one hundred meters. A frozen riverbed is suited best; this was the preferred playing field in the Deh Cho.

Teams and Players

- 1 Men and boys only play this game.
- 2 The game is played between individual competitors; no team contest has been documented. At Ft. Rae, up to ten players are known to have participated, challenging one another.

How to Play

Preparation

- 1 The throwing line is marked into the snow on the ground.
- 2 The area behind the throwing line has to be kept free of spectators and other participants, because a player has the option of running to the throwing line before releasing the 'snake'.

Starting Position—Variation 1: 'Stationary Release'

- 3 The player positions himself at the throwing line, and throws the 'snake' from a stationary position.

Starting Position—Variation 2: 'Running Release'

- 4 The player positions himself well behind the throwing line, runs to the throwing line and releases the snake. The length of this run has not been documented; it appears that every player

was free to run as far as he thought necessary.

Either of these variations may be used, but the participants can also decide before beginning the game that only one will be used during the contest.

Grasping the Snake—Variation 1: 'Centre Grip'

- 5 The snake or arrow is held at a point near the centre of gravity, so that it lies well-balanced in the hand. It is grasped between the thumb and index, and between the middle and ring fingers. The 'centre grip' is the better option for the 'running release.' An underhand throw is used to release the snake.

Grasping the Snake—Variation 2: 'End Grip'

- 6 The snake is held at the butt or blunt end with the thumb and middle finger. The index finger rests on the butt end itself. The pointed end of the snake is lightly guided and supported with the other hand.

Movement—Variations 1-2

- 7 'Centre grip': The player, standing at, or arriving at, the centre line, releases the snake with a wide sweep of the arm.
- 8 'End grip': The player, positioned at the throwing line, swings the snake a number of times, to gain throwing velocity. The movement is similar to that of a pendulum. The snake is released with a flick of the wrist—the way flat stones are scaled on water; this further increases the snake's velocity.
- 9 The player may not step across the throwing line. In case of an infraction, the attempt will be invalid.

Duration and End of Competition

- 10 The snake sinks into the snow, but it will invariably surface after a short distance, then travel on top of the snow. Sometimes, the snake will ricochet off an obstacle hidden in the snow, and change its direction of travel.
- 11 The player whose snake glides the furthest, wins the competition.

Things to Consider

The path the snake will travel may not always be predictable. Spectators should stay well clear of the playing area.

In the Old Days

This game was probably accompanied by betting. Among many Native peoples living to the south, the spear or arrow was decorated with feathers, but this has not been reported for the Dene.

SNOW SNAKE — VARIATION 2

Idea of the Game

This variation of Snow Snake was much more dangerous than the one described in the previous section. The arrow or javelin was not thrown, but was 'batted' with a paddle or club. An arrow propelled in this manner travelled faster than it would have when shot from even the strongest Dene bow. This could be an extremely dangerous game. The Gwich'in played this game for distance, while in the Sahtu it was played for accuracy or distance.

Equipment

- 1 A number of javelins ('snakes'), one per player. Preferably, they are made of birch or willow, but other trees can also be used. The bark is removed, and an arrow with a hardened, pointed end is manufactured. Wooden snakes vary in length from 70 cm to about 1.5 m. The diameter is about 2 cm.
- 2 The horn of a bull caribou can also be used. Horn which is still covered in velvet is considered the best. The velvet is removed and the horn straightened and cured with grease.
- 3 A club or 'paddle', which in the Sahtu is made of birch. Among the Gwich'in, spruce might also be used. It is shaped like a baseball bat, but was flat at the end.

Playing Area

- 1 A wide open, fairly flat space. If hit right, the 'snake' will travel several hundred meters. A frozen lake or riverbed is suited best for this game.

Teams and Players

- 1 In the Sahtu, a strict rule exists that this game is to be played by adults only.
- 2 Among the Gwich'in, according to Osgood, the older boys also play this game.
- 3 Women and girls do not play.

How to Play

Preparation

- 1 Among the Gwich'in, a snow bank is found or put up. The arrow is driven into the edge of the snowbank at a convenient height of about 60-80 cm so that the pointed end of the arrow protruded outwards. The end of the arrow remains extended about 15 cm.
- 2 In the Sahtu, the players do not use a snowbank. Instead, a hole is dug into the snow in which the player stands. The arrow is then placed in the snow, about 15 cm below the surface, and aimed at the target tree. The arrow extends in the same way as described above.
- 3 In the Sahtu, this game is a test of accuracy. The target tree, about 15 cm in diameter and partly cut away, is set up. The distance between player and target tree has not been documented.
- 4 Spectators should stay well back and to the sides of the snowbank and the 'batting' player.

Starting Position

- 5 The player hits the arrow as hard as possible, much like a baseball is hit today.

Movement

- 6 The arrow travels very fast and very far. Moving under the snow, it cannot be seen. It can ricochet off invisible objects under the snow. Several such collisions can turn the arrow around and send it back to the player.
- 7 An arrow travelling under the snow in this manner will eventually rise up out of the snow and glide on top of the snow. If it has been aimed right, it will still be travelling fast enough to knock down the target tree, even then.

Duration and End of Competition

- 8 Among the Gwich'in, the player whose 'snake' glides the furthest wins the competition.
- 9 In the Sahtu, the player attempts to knock down the target tree, but the exact method of determining the winner has not been documented.

Things to Consider

The path the snake will travel may not always be predictable. Spectators should stay well clear of the playing area.

In the Old Days

According to old-timers at the Sahtu Dene Games Workshop in Ft. Norman, this game was based on traditional hunting methods. The arrow's speed was so high that, even after travelling a certain distance below the surface, it was still fast enough to go right through the body of a moose, when it rose back out of the snow.

SPEAR THROW

Idea of the Game

The spear throw stood out from the great variety of Dene games requiring and training accuracy, in its very close connection to the old hunting ways. In the old days, the spear was one of the major weapons of the hunt and warfare.

Equipment

- 1 Short spears of about 30-50cm are made out of the bottom section of a small spruce tree. The big end is pointed so that it will stick into the ground when thrown. The stick is cut so that a set of limbs are about 10-15 cm up from the heavy end. These are cut off 7-10cm from the shaft.

Playing Area

- 1 Any clear flat area without obstructions will do.

Teams and Players

- 1 The spear throw is most often played by two people.

How to Play

Preparation

- 1 A target spear is first thrown out, to a distance of 15-25 m.

Starting Position, Movement and End of Competition

- 2 The two players stand behind a throwing line marked on the ground. They take turns throwing their spears towards the target. The closest throw wins.

Things to Consider

This game can be played at all times of the year.

In the Old Days

The spear was one of the preferred weapons for the caribou and moose hunt. Hunters would often wait at rivers the caribou herds had to cross during their annual migrations. The caribou were speared from canoes and pulled to shore.

STICK PULL — VARIATION 1

Idea of the Game

Two players stood, or knelt or sat on the ground, facing each other. With one hand, each grasped an end of a greased stick. Upon a signal, each attempted to pull the stick out of the opponent's hand. This game could be played as a competition between individuals or as a team competition. The team competition is described in the next section.

Equipment

- 1 A number of dry spruce, pine or birch sticks. Measurements: 30cm long, the diameter in the middle is about 2.5 cm, the stick tapers off towards the ends, where the diameter is no larger than 0.5 cm. In order to avoid injury to the players, the surface has to be polished smoothly.
- 2 General purpose grease (Crisco); tissue.
- 3 Two wall tents.
- 4 30 m of plastic rope.

Playing Area

- 1 The game is played in two wall tents at the same time, but only one bout occurs at any given moment. The tents are set up about 5 m apart, the entrance areas facing each other.
- 2 The participants have to move quickly from one tent to the other. The area between the tents has to be kept free of spectators, and should be roped off.

Teams and Players

- 1 The game is played by men and boys. Women and girls do not play.
- 2 This is a competition between individuals, not teams.
- 3 In the old days, there was no division into weight or age classes. The game started with the youngest boys, and, as competitors were eliminated, gradually involved the bigger and stronger players.

How to Play

Preparation

- 1 Before each bout, the stick is thoroughly greased with Crisco.
- 2 The two groups of participants are put together in such a way that the youngest, evenly matched players begin the competition. As the match progresses, the bigger and stronger participants gradually begin to enter the competition, as described below.
- 3 One group of players assembles in Tent One, the other in Tent Two. The competition begins in Tent One.

Starting Positions—Variation 1: Kneeling Position

- 4 The first two competitors kneel on the ground with the 'inside' knee (with the knee closest to the competitor). The 'outside' leg is extended towards the opponent, the hip of the pulling side turned towards the opponent's. Each grasps his side of the stick, their thumbs and index fingers facing each other. The competitors may lean backwards to increase the force of their pull, but they may not touch the opponent.

Starting Positions—Variation 2: Sitting Position

- 5 The first two competitors sit down on the ground with the hip of their pulling side turned towards each other and their legs extended. Each grabs his side of the stick, the thumb and index finger face those of the opponent.

Starting Positions—Variation 3: Standing Position

- 6 The first two competitors stand 30cm apart with the hip of their pulling side turned towards each other. The inside leg is extended, the outside leg may be extended or bent at the knee. With their pulling arm extended straight down towards the ground, each grasps his side of the stick, their thumbs and index fingers facing each other. While pulling the arm has to be kept straight and extended at all times. This is the starting position used at the Arctic Winter Games.
- 7 The opponents decide before the start of the competition which starting position will be used.

Movement

- 8 The competitors begin to pull upon the signal: "3-2-1- pull!"
- 9 The opponents pull steadily and strong. No jerking, twisting or sideways movement is allowed. In particular, a 'quick start', that is, a sudden, strong pull immediately following the start signal, is strongly discouraged. Each of these infractions will be penalized with the loss of the bout. This decision has to be made by the referee.
- 10 When either Variation (1) or Variation (2) of the starting position is used:
The competitors may lean backwards to increase the force of their pull, but they may not touch the opponent.

Duration

- 11 Usually, it will not be necessary to set a time limit for a bout. Even when the competitors are evenly matched, fatigue will be a deciding factor.

End of Bout

- 12 The bout ends when one player succeeds in pulling the stick from the opponent's hand.
- 13 The losing player is eliminated from the competition. The winner *immediately* gets up and *runs* to Tent Two, where he *immediately* takes on an opponent who is already waiting for him. *No breaks are allowed.* A greased stick has been prepared in Tent Two, so that the bout can begin immediately. In the meantime, the stick in Tent One is re-greased and a new challenger sits down, ready for the winner of the bout in progress in Tent Two. The winner of the bout in

Tent Two will immediately run across to Tent One, where he immediately takes on the waiting opponent.

End of Competition

- 14 The competition continues as described until all but two participants are eliminated. The winner of the final bout is also the winner of the competition overall.

Things to Consider

This variation of the stick pull can be played as a team contest by awarding one point to the winner of a bout. Each participant stays in the competition and can win points for his team as long as he continues winning his bouts. The team from the community with the greatest number of points wins.

In the Old Days

Nalàiiirak was a 'national' game of the Gwich'in. It was often played in wintertime, especially after a successful hunt, when everybody had a good supply of meat. The chief or a successful hunter invited the people to a feast. After everybody had eaten, the men and boys joined in the stick pull. On these occasions, bear grease was used to grease the stick. The women and girls watched the game, but they did not take part.

The Rev. David Salmon remembers that in some Alaskan Gwich'in communities, the stick was decorated with eagle feathers which were tied to the centre of the stick using beaded strings. In the summer, people from the communities of Arctic Village, Ft. Yukon and Chalkyitsik met and competed in the *nalàiiirak*. The winning team took the decorated stick back to the community, and defended it at the subsequent summer's competition.

STICK PULL — VARIATION 2

Idea of the Game

Even when organized as a team game, the stick pull was still a competition between individual opponents. The goal of the bout was the same as described before, but the teams attempted to 'pull each other out of the tent'. This required a somewhat different form of organization.

Equipment

- 1 A number of dry spruce, pine or birch sticks. Measurements: 30cm long, the diameter in the middle is about 2.5cm, the stick tapers off towards the ends, where the diameter is no larger than 0.5cm. In order to avoid injury to the players, the surface has to be polished smoothly.
- 2 General purpose grease (Crisco); tissue.
- 3 One wall tent or a tent frame.
- 4 Masking tape or spray paint.

Playing Area

- 1 The game is played in the entrance area of a wall tent or tent frame.

Teams and Players

- 1 The game is played by men only. Women and children do not play.
- 2 This is a team competition between two teams of 6 *partners* each.

How to Play

Preparations

- 1 The centre line of the entrance area is marked out on the ground with masking tape or spray paint.
- 2 The game can be played with a greased or a plain stick. If the competitors decide to play with a greased stick, it is thoroughly greased with Crisco before the beginning of each bout. A number of greased sticks should be prepared prior to the competition
- 3 Team A assembles inside the tent, Team B on the outside.

Starting Position

- 4 The first two competitors kneel with on the ground. One leg is extended towards the other competitor. The hip of the pulling side turned towards each other. Each grasps his side of the stick, their thumbs and index fingers facing each other.

Movement

- 5 The competitors begin to pull upon the signal: "3-2-1- pull!"
- 6 The opponents pull steadily and strong. No jerking, twisting or sideways movement is allowed. Each of these infractions will be penalized with the loss of the bout.

- 7 The competitors may lean backwards or extend their legs to increase the force of their pull, but they may not touch the opponent.

Duration

- 8 Usually, it will not be necessary to set a time limit for a bout. Even when the competitors are evenly matched, fatigue will be the deciding factor.

End of Bout

- 9 The bout ends when one player succeeds in pulling the stick from the opponent's hand, or when one of the opponents loses his balance and moves across the centre line marked out on the ground.
- 10 The losing player is eliminated from the competition. One of his team mates *immediately* takes his place and *immediately* takes on the winner of the preceding bout. *No breaks are allowed.*

End of Competition

- 11 The competition continues as described until all but two participants are eliminated. The winner of the final bout wins the competition overall for his team.

Things to Consider

It could happen that one of the participants is so strong that he succeeds in eliminating all his opponents before his teammates have an opportunity to get involved in the competition. This will rarely happen in practice because even a strong competitor will sooner or later tire out.

In the Old Days

Mrs. Annie G. Robert explained that sometimes the competitor on the inside was allowed to hang on to the door frame in trying to avoid being pulled out of the lodge. This variation of *nalaiirak* could be somewhat rougher than the one described above, especially when it was played in a tent frame.

STICK THROW

Idea of the Game

In this variation of the game, pairs of players ('partners') challenged other pairs to a competition. The idea of the game was similar to that of the individual competition, but it could last much longer. The following description applies mainly to the way the game was played in the Sahtu, but other descriptions indicate that it was played in a similar way in some parts of Gwich'in and Slavey country. When the game was played this way, it could last a very long time.

Equipment

- 1 Two sticks of about 30cm per player. The target stick is firmly put into the ground in front of the player. The other one is used for throwing.
- 2 A tape measure may be used, but this is not usually necessary.

Playing Area

- 1 An open and level area, large enough for pairs of players to stand facing each other at a distance of about 30m.

Teams and Players

- 1 Players enter the competition as partners, that is, any multiple of two may play.

How to Play

Preparation

- 1 The first pair of players take up their position at a distance of about 30m from each other and facing each other. (According to Gabe Etchinelle, a distance of about 12-15m was also common.) The other pairs line up in the same way: Facing their partner, the players take up their position beside the two players in the first pair, at a distance of perhaps 1-1.5m, space permitting. Depending on the number of pairs entering the competition, there are two lines of players with perhaps six, eight, or even more players (lines 'A' and 'B').
- 2 Each player firmly puts the target stick into the ground just before his feet.

Starting Position and Movement

- 3 The competitors in Line 'A' begin the competition. They take their position behind their own target stick.
- 4 The players in Line 'A' throw their sticks at their partners' target stick. All players throw their stick at the same time. No sticks should be thrown by players in Lines 'A' and 'B' at the same time.
- 5 The sticks are left at the point where they came to rest. The players in Line 'B' do *not* pick up the sticks thrown from Line 'A'.

- 6 Now the players in Line 'B' take their turn throwing. They also attempt to hit their partner's target stick, or aim as close as possible. The players in Line 'A' do not pick up their partners' throwing sticks; these are also left at the point where they came to rest.

End of Round and Competition

- 7 The competition can only be won when *both* players making up a pair manage to place their throwing stick closest to the target. That is, *during the same round*, one player must beat all the other players in Line 'A', his partner must beat all the players in Line 'B'. This ends the competition.
- 8 If players from two different pairs have the best throws, the round ends in a tie and the competition continues.
- 9 Sometimes it may be difficult to decide whose stick is closest to the target. In this case, a tape measure can be used, but this is usually unnecessary.

Things to Consider

The game will sometimes last for hours before a pair of partners wins the round. Thus there is no need for an elimination format. Everybody can continue playing until the competition is decided in favor of one pair.

In the Old Days

Traditionally, this game was accompanied by betting. Each player gambled against some or all of the players in his line. When a pair wins the competition, each player of the winning pair is paid by all the players against whom he gambled in his own line.

Tappan Adney, a gold seeker who went to the Yukon during the Klondike gold rush, observed the game played in the way described here, by the Han in the vicinity of Dawson City—during the time of the gold rush, the Gwich'in frequently visited with the Han people:

"A favorite game was 'kli-so-kot,' or 'throwing-the-stick.' A row of five or six small stakes is set up in the hard-packed snow of the village street [hunting camp], and another row thirty or forty feet distant. Each contestant provides himself with two clubs, and taking turns, they throw these at first one, then the other, of the group of upright stakes, the one who knocks down the greatest number of stakes being the winner."

Gabe Etchinelle points out that the game could be played as a team game also. The organization was the same, but each team had only one target stick. The throwing distance was about 12-15 m. One player from 'Team A' played against a player from 'Team B'. The winner received one point for his team. Then the next pair of players stepped up to play. The team with the highest number of points won the competition.

GWICH'IN SWING

Idea of the Game

Dene Swing was a game played for fun. Although it is hardly ever played nowadays, it is well remembered by Dene elders as a game providing great excitement. The game was usually played in a non-competitive format, but a competitive version existed in which the participants would try to pull each other off the swing. This version is described here.

Equipment

- 1 A long rope of braided babiche, at least 4 strand strong (1.5-2.5 cm thick).
- 2 Two smaller and thinner ropes, about 3-4 m long
- 3 Two tall spruce trees are required for Dene Swing. If these are not available, two straight spruce poles, about 8-12 m tall, can be used instead.

Playing Area

- 1 For the forward swing, a fairly open and flat space, with 2 tall spruce trees standing about 3-4.5 m apart, is required. For the side straddle swing, the trees should be about 4.5-6 m apart. There should be enough clear space between the trees to allow for safe, high swinging.

Teams and Players

- 1 Everybody plays this game.

How to Play

Preparation

- 1 If the spruce poles are used, they can be frozen into the ice or anchored firmly in the ground. They are placed 3-4.5 m apart (4.5-6 m for the side straddle swing).
- 2 The ends of the babiche rope are tied 7-8 m up each tree or pole so that the bottom of the loop formed is about 90 cm-1.2 m from the ground when someone sits on it.
- 3 The small pulling ropes are tied to the thick rope at the bottom of the loop.

Starting Position—Forward Swing

- 4 The player jumps onto the swing and pulls him- or herself up into the seated position in the swing.

Starting Position—Side Straddle Swing

- 5 The player jumps onto the swing and pulls him- or herself into a straddle position such that the rope is placed between the legs. That is, he or she sits in the swing sideways.

Movement

- 6 Two rope pullers grab one of the two small pulling ropes each. Upon a signal, they begin to take turns pulling the player on the swing from rear and front, in time with the movement of the swing itself.
- 7 Soon the player on the swing will fly higher and higher, sailing back and forth several meters above the ground.
- 8 The side straddle swing is even more difficult to play. It calls for even greater balance and athletic skill, causing even more thrills, laughter and fun. The rope pullers swing the player high into the air. If they fail to unseat the player on the swing, they can violently pull the swing into other directions (sideways) as well. The straddle swing requires great skill of the player on the swing.

Duration and End of Competition

- 9 When the rope pullers manage to unseat the player on the swing, another takes her or his turn.
- 10 The player who stays on the swing the longest wins the competition.

Things to Consider

While this game can be great fun, it can also be fairly dangerous. Care should be taken to play on as soft a surface as possible.

In the Old Days

In the Sahtu, the competitive version of the game was sometimes accompanied by gambling. Among the Gwich'in, the swing was set up for the feast and games which followed a successful hunt. The bouncing game, the stick pull and the swing were some of the games commonly played during such a feast.

TUG-OF-WAR

Idea of the Game

The tug-of-war was a favorite game of most Dene. It was organized in the same way it is played elsewhere in North America. Everybody took part, and often a team of men was challenged by a women's team. The outcome was not always as certain as one would have expected.

Equipment

- 1 15-20m of strong rope; braided babiche, at least 4 or 5 strands thick, can also be used. A flag (a piece of cloth) is tied to the centre of the rope.
- 2 2 sticks to mark out the playing area.

Playing Area

- 1 The area where the game is played should be flat and open.

Teams and Players

- 1 Any number of people can participate, as long as the teams are evenly matched in terms of number and size of players. Among Dogrib people, eight players per side seems to have been a preferred number at one time.
- 2 Often, the women would play against the men.

How to Play

Preparation

- 1 The two sticks are driven into the ground about 3-5m apart. The rope is stretched out on the ground so that the centre flag is placed midway between the two marker sticks.
- 2 A loop can be tied into the ends of the rope.

Starting Position

- 3 The teams line up on their end of the rope and take up the slack such that the centre flag is positioned at true centre.
- 4 On each team, the player at the end of the rope puts his or her shoulder through the loop in order to prevent the rope from slipping.

Movement

- 5 Upon the signal: "3-2-1-pull!", the teams begin to pull away with all their might.

End of Contest

- 6 The team who manages to pull the marker flag past the stick driven into the ground is the winner.

Things to Consider

This is a fun game in which everybody can take part. It does not have to be played in a competitive elimination format.

In the Old Days

The women often challenged the men. Among the Gwich'in it was not uncommon for the women to beat the men, "not so surprising for those who know the strength of Kutchin women" (Cornelius Osgood). There is an old-time photo in Ft. McPherson which shows at least 19 women pulling on one side! Among all the Dene, the women did much of the hard work when people travelled on the land; this may well have been the reason for their great strength. Ed Hardisty likewise remembers that on one occasion he watched the women beat the men in the tug-of-war at Tulit'a.

In later days, the tug-of-war came to be part of the 'sports day'. Throughout Dene country, this event came to be held around July 1. Gwich'in on the Alaskan side hold their sports day on July 4.

UDZI

Idea of the Game

This is a contemporary version of the Hand Game, adapted to allow for shorter rounds of play. These rules have been used at the *Arctic Winter Games* and the *Sahtu Dene Games*. This description is included here in order to clarify the structure of the game. The traditional form is described in detail in: June Helm & N.L. Oestreich, *The Dogrib Hand Game*.

Equipment

- 1 A mat, on which the players kneel or squat, is spread out on the ground.
- 2 A blanket or other cover which the players may use to conceal their hands when hiding.
- 3 Four or more Dene drums.
- 4 Thirty counting stick for each team. These sticks should be finger-sized; they may be peeled or decorated.
- 5 A small coin, a .22 shell, or some other small object to be used for hiding. It must be presented before the game and used throughout the game.

Playing Area

- 1 The mat on which the players kneel is spread out on the ground.

Teams and Players

- 1 This is a team competition with teams of four players on each team.
- 2 For the Arctic Winter Games, each team will be accompanied by a coach who prepares the team for play, but who does not himself play.
- 3 Each team will declare one player at a time to be the captain or pointer (guesser). The captain can be changed at any time during a game.

How to Play

Preparation

- 1 For a four man team, all games will start with twelve sticks. The sticks are placed in the middle between the opposing teams.
- 2 Play is started by a guessing contest between the opposing captains, who hide and guess the position of the other's object simultaneously. This continues until one captain is successful while the other is not. The team whose captain wins this initial exchange, is the first to hide their tokens.

Starting Position

- 3 Teams start in a kneeling position, facing each other in pairs. Players on one team may switch positions during the game.

Movement

- 4 The drummers begin to play, signalling the beginning of the competition.
- 5 Each player on the hiding team takes his token and, with hands behind his back, concealed under the blanket, or hidden between his thighs, shuffles it from hand to hand. Presenting the hands for the other team to see, the player attempts to deceive the opposing team's captain with elaborate gestures of the hands, arms, head and upper body. This movement takes place with all players on the team at the same time.
- 6 Players may not cross and uncross their arms.
- 7 When hiding their token, players must stay down no longer than, at most, 8 seconds.

Guessing

- 8 Only four hand signals are used in this team competition. All players on the opposing team are guessed at the same time. The signals are shown below. As the players may present their fists with their arms extended or crossed over, the signals designate the location of the token relative to body side.
- 9 When the captain is ready to make a call (hand signal), a loud sound must be given, such as a hand clap, a sharp whistle, or a shout such as 'Ho!' or 'Hutch!'
- 10 When a call is made, players on the hiding team must present both closed fists at once. They either extend their arms with their closed fists palm down, or they cross their arms over the chest so that the fists come to rest towards the shoulders.
- 11 Players may touch the ground or floor and call, 'Diya!', when using the crossed-arm position to indicate opposites. In this case the captain must identify the location of the object as if the arms were not crossed (opposites).

Tallying

- 12 Each time the captain is unsuccessful in guessing the position of an opposing player's object, he gives the player's team a stick from the middle. A player who is guessed correctly by the captain, is eliminated from the round. When a player successfully deceives the captain, he stays in the competition. Play continues until the 12 sticks placed in the middle have been given out, at which point captains must draw on the collection of sticks which they have won thus far.
- 13 When all players on one team have been guessed, the right to 'play' (that is, to hide the objects) moves to the other team who then attempt to win the sticks either left in the middle, or those already won by the other team.

End of Game

- 14 One game consists of winning two rounds of play (best of three): 12 +12 or 24 sticks. A team winning a round will return all the sticks to the opposing team and commence the second round, with all players. A round still in progress after 15 minutes will be won by the team holding the greater number of counting sticks.

Competition Format

- 15 Round robin, the initial pairs are determined by draw. There are no playoffs, the team that has won the most games in the competition will be declared the winner. In the case of a tie, the team who has won the most sticks in the timed competition will be declared the winner. Alternatively, a one-round tie-breaker can be played.

Hand Signals

- 1 The four hand signals shown below are used for the Arctic Winter Games team competition.

Illustration 1

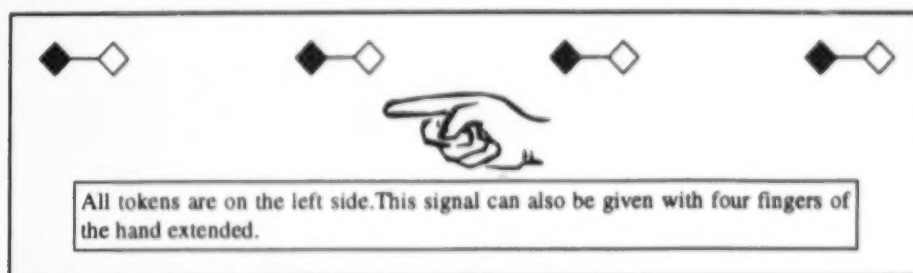


Illustration 2

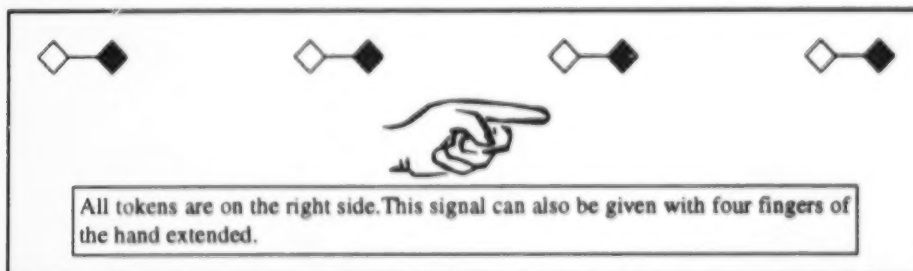


Illustration 3

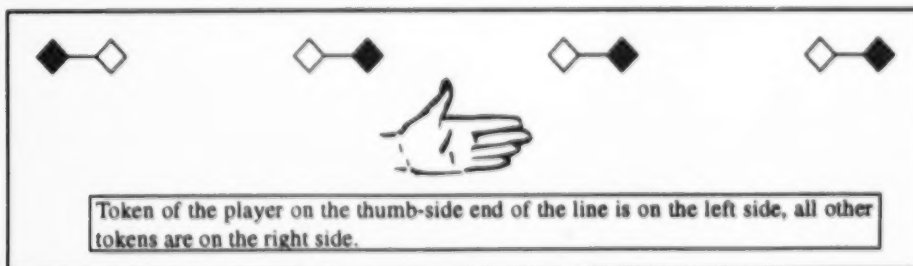


Illustration 4

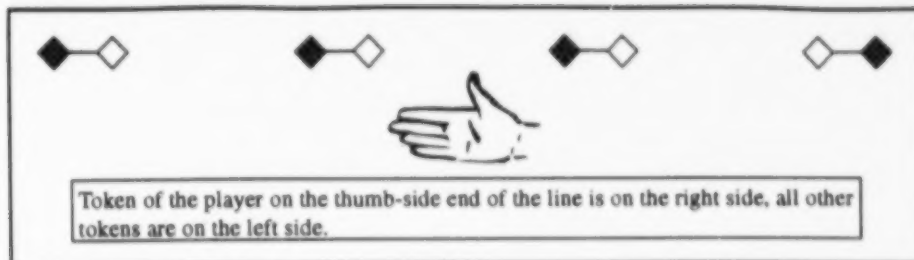


Illustration 5

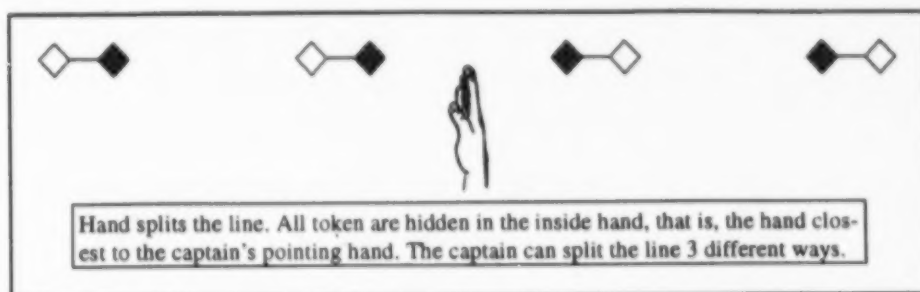
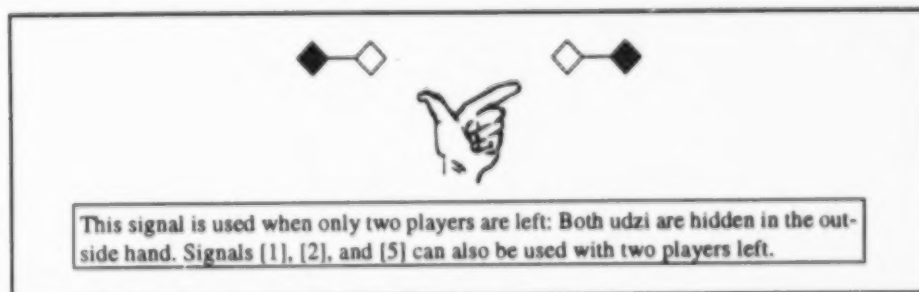


Illustration 6



WRESTLING

Idea of the Game

Wrestling was as popular among the Gwich'in as among the other Dene peoples, but the Gwich'in way of wrestling was distinguished from that of the other groups by the peculiar 'challenge order' used to organize the game.

Equipment

- 1 No equipment is required for this game.

Playing Area

- 1 Any open, fairly flat space will do.

Teams and Players

- 1 Everybody plays this game, men, women, and children. Men and boys, and women and girls wrestle separately. Traditionally, the players would avoid wrestling against relatives.

How to Play

Preparations

- 1 The players are organized according to size and strength, not age. The smallest children begin the competition. Everybody can enter the competition at any point, but the opponents have to be evenly matched throughout.

Starting Position

- 2 The player grabs his opponent's shoulders and puts the forehead against the opponent's forehead. Instead, the player may grab the opponent's upper arms.

Duration of Bout

- 3 Upon a signal, the opponents begin to lift, push and pull each other around, attempting to throw each other to the ground.
- 4 There are no breaks or rounds, no time limits or 'out of bounds'. The bout continues for as long as necessary.
- 5 Tripping the opponent is not allowed. This game is decided by body strength.
- 6 The bout ends when a player succeeds in throwing the opponent to the ground.

End of Competition

- 7 The loser of a bout immediately leaves the playing area. The winner gets up and immediately takes on the next challenger. *No breaks are allowed.* In order to prevent the winner of the previous bout from regaining his strength, the new challenger should attack as quickly as possible.
- 8 The loser of a bout cannot reenter the competition at a later point.

- 9 The competition gradually involves the stronger wrestlers. The winner of the final bout is the winner of the competition overall.
- 10 Sometimes, the winner of the women's competition would challenge the winner on the men's side, but this was done for fun only—everybody laughed about it.

Things to Consider

Although this can be a very competitive game, the 'challenge order' described above makes sure that every member of the group has an opportunity to get involved; nobody has to be excluded for lack of skill, strength or fitness. In this regard, Gwich'in and Dene wrestling is quite different from the way modern sports are divided into age and performance groups, 'Juniors', 'Seniors,' 'Majors,' 'Minors.' This points to the strong basis of cooperation and communality underlying even the most competitive Dene traditional games.

In the Old Days

Hudson's Bay trader William Hardisty observed the game played in the Fort Yukon area, in 1847:

"Their wrestling matches are commenced generally by two little boys. When one of them is thrown he retires and another, a little bigger, takes his place. As soon as he has thrown his opponent, he rises up quickly and places himself in preparation for the next, who will make a sudden rush at him so as to get an advantageous hold before he is prepared and while still panting from his previous exertion. Still, if he be the stronger or more expert, he may knock down his second adversary, also the third or perhaps the fourth before he is thrown, when he retires and leaves the field to his conqueror, who in his turn will continue to throw as many as he can, one after the other, until he, too, perhaps from exhaustion is obliged to give way to a fresher or more vigorous opponent. The combatants rise in gradation until all the men have had their turn, and one, the last, remains alone on the ground with the honour of being the best wrestler of the tribe."

The Gwich'in, like the other Dene peoples, used wrestling as a form of greeting when groups met on the trail. It appears, however, that the men, but not the women, would do this. This was before the time when Dene began to shake hands for the same symbolic purpose.